

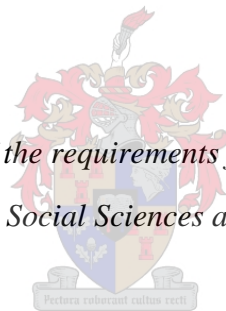
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**Orestes, from a Moral Model to an Authentic Free Person**

***The Depiction of Orestes by Aeschylus and Sartre***

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*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University*



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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a comparative study of the depiction of Orestes by Aeschylus and Sartre which seeks to examine how Sartre turns Orestes, a traditional tragic hero in Aeschylus, into an existentialist hero. The study first investigates the different motivations for Orestes' matricide depicted in the *Choephoroi* and *The Flies*. The investigation reveals that Orestes in the *Choephoroi* is obligated to preserve his religious and moral responsibilities; he commits the matricide in order to obey the law of revenge which is sanctified by the gods and fate. Whereas Aeschylus is concerned the moral responsibilities which guide Orestes to commit matricide, Sartre retells the story of Orestes by focusing on his freedom in terms of his choices. The motivation for Orestes' matricide in *The Flies* does not have anything to do with religious and moral responsibilities. It is governed by the norm of authenticity, which is the degree to which one is true to oneself despite external pressures. This thesis also provides a character analysis of Orestes as he is portrayed by the two authors. In order to embody his existentialist views in the story, Sartre makes careful and deliberate changes in the way of depicting Orestes. The "theatre of plot" as it occurs in Greek tragedy could not serve Sartre's purpose of expressing human subjectivity. Sartre therefore invents a new drama form, the theatre of situations. In this new drama form, the motivation of Orestes' matricide in the *Choephoroi* has been replaced. Unlike Orestes in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* who is portrayed as a conveyer of certain moral values, Orestes in *The Flies* makes the choice for committing matricide according to the rule of authenticity; he becomes an existentialist hero and the designer of his own destiny.

**Key words:** Aeschylus, Greek tragedy, protagonist, matricide, motivation, moral law, Sartre, existentialist, human choice, freedom, authenticity, bad faith, theatre of situations.

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## OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis is 'n vergelykende studie van die uitbeelding van Orestes deur Aeschylus en Sartre met die doel om te ondersoek hoe Sartre Orestes transformeer van 'n tradisionele tragiese held in Aeschylus tot 'n eksistensialistiese held. Die studie ondersoek eerstens die verskillende motiverings vir Orestes se moedermoord soos dit uitgebeeld word in die *Choephoroi* en *Die Vlieë*. Die ondersoek toon dat Orestes in die *Choephoroi* 'n verpligting het om sy godsdienstige en morele verantwoordelikhede na te kom. Hy pleeg die moedermoord om wraak te pleeg, 'n wraak wat deur die gode verorden is. Terwyl Aeschylus fokus op die morele verantwoordelikheid wat Orestes lei om moedermoord te pleeg, vertel Sartre die verhaal van Orestes deur te fokus op sy vryheid van keuse. Die motivering vir die moedermoord deur Orestes in *Die Vlieë* het niks te doen met godsdienstige en morele verantwoordelikhede nie. Dit word gerig deur die norm van egtheid, wat beïnvloed tot watter mate die individu getrou is aan homself ten spyte van eksterne druk. Hierdie tesis bied ook 'n karakterontleding van Orestes soos hy uitgebeeld word deur die twee outeurs. Om sy eksistensialistiese in die verhaal uitdrukking te gee, maak Sartre versigtige en doelbewuste veranderinge aan die uitbeelding van Orestes. Die "teater van plot" soos dit voorkom in die Griekse tragedie kon nie Sartre se doel van die uitdrukking van die menslike subjektiwiteit dien nie. Sartre ontwikkel dus 'n nuwe vorm van drama, die teater van situasies. In hierdie nuwe vorm van drama, word die motivering vir Orestes se moedermoord in die *Choephoroi* verander. Anders as Orestes in die *Choephoroi* en die *Eumenides* wat uitgebeeld is as 'n draer van spesifieke morele waardes, maak Orestes in *Die Vlieë* die keuse om moedermoord te pleeg om aan die vereiste van egtheid te voldoen. Hy word 'n eksistensialistiese held en die meester van sy eie lot.

**Trefwoorde:** Aeschylus, Griekse tragedie, protagonis, moedermoord, motivering, morele wet, Sartre, eksistensialis, die mens se keuse, vryheid, egtheid, swak geloof, teater van situasies.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Focus and rationale

Many stories in contemporary literature are adaptations of ancient Greek myths. Orestes is a character in several plays in Western literature. His story has been dramatized by many authors including Aeschylus (525/524 – 456/455 BCE), an ancient Greek tragedian, and Jean-Paul Sartre (21 June 1905 – 15 April 1980), a well-known French philosopher. Although the main narrative outlines of these dramas are similar, there are significant variations in the authors' opinion with regard to the motivation for Orestes' matricide. However, even though there are a handful of studies which analyze Orestes' matricide in *The Flies* and the *Choephoroi* individually, little attention has been given to the relationship between these two plays. This thesis, therefore, aims to make a comparison of the two plays. The study is concerned with two aspects: The primary focus is an analysis of the different motivation for Orestes' matricide in respectively *The Flies* and the *Choephoroi*. The secondary focus involves a comparison of the two plays.

### 1.2 Two different views regarding human choice

How should a man make choices? Are there moral or social standards driving a man to make choices? Do human beings have freedom to make choices unconstrained by religion, culture or moral responsibility? These are philosophical questions concerning human choice. Ancient Greek philosophers and the Existentialists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century give different answers to these questions, and their answers are reflected in the different motivation for Orestes' matricide in the *Choephoroi* and *The Flies*. The purpose of the following part is, therefore, to give a broad philosophical context from which the answers to these questions will be derived. It is important to mention that this study does not aim to engage in numerous philosophical debates; of interest here is a broad philosophical context in order to facilitate an understanding of the motivation for Orestes' matricide discussed in chapters two and four.



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### 1.2.1 Ancient Greek view of human choice

In 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Greece, both religion and philosophy tried to give explanations regarding the driving force of human choices. According to Manetti (1993:15), the Greek gods were worshiped because the gods were seen as more superior beings than human beings in ancient Greece; their superiority is manifested in their knowledge and power. Firstly, Greek gods were seen as the ultimate forces ruling human beings; the will of the Gods was highly respected and was one of the most powerful driving forces guiding people to make choices. The opening of Homer's *Iliad* informs the reader that everything is controlled by Zeus' will and that the gods are absolutely in control. We read that "sing, goddess, of the anger of Achilles, which brought sorrow to many Achaeans, and sent many mighty souls of heroes to Hades, and turned them into food for dogs and all the birds, and the will of Zeus was accomplished" (Homer, *Iliad*, 1.1-5)<sup>1</sup>. Secondly, according to Manetti (1993:15), ancient Greeks assumed that there were two different kinds of knowledge: The first kind of knowledge is the knowledge of the present, the past and future; the second kind of knowledge is the knowledge of the revealed and the hidden; human beings can attain knowledge of present and past, as well as revealed knowledge. However, the gods were considered more knowledgeable than human beings; they could gain a knowledge which is beyond what man could reach; their knowledge reached to the future and the hidden which were inaccessible to human beings.

Because the gods are more knowledgeable and powerful, Fairbanks (1906: 44) argues that it is believed by the ancient Greeks that human choices must be guided by the gods. For instance, Homer attributes the inspiration of the *Iliad* to the Muses: "Tell me now, you Muses that live on Olympus, since you are goddesses and witness all that happens, whereas we men know nothing that we are not told" (Homer, *Iliad*, 2:285). In Herodotus, the gods could even give an answer to the enquiry beyond what had been requested. Apollo declares his knowledge through his oracle: "The number of sand I know, and the measure of drops in

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<sup>1</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to the *Iliad* is that of F. Robert (1990).

the ocean; the dumb man I understand, and I hear the speech of the speechless” (Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.47)<sup>2</sup>. If human beings want to do something important, they need to ask help from the gods.

However, the religious explanations started being rejected by some of the pre-Socratic philosophers. Many classical Greek philosophers tried to explain human choice through rational thinking. According to Liddell & Scott (1968:238), virtue<sup>3</sup> was seen as one of the most important fundamental principles guiding people to make choices by several classical Greek philosophers; to be virtuous was seen as the ultimate purpose of human life by these philosophers. One of the most well-known theories of the universe in Plato’s works is the theory of Forms. In the *Republic*, Plato’s Socrates splits the existing world into two realms: the realm of material and the realm of Forms (Plato, *Republic*, 428e)<sup>4</sup>. In the *Phaedo*, Plato’s Socrates explains that the ultimate essence of the world was Forms (Plato, *Phaedo*, 100b-102a)<sup>5</sup>. In the *Republic*, Forms for Socrates were arranged in different levels; the highest level of Form is the Form of the Good; the Form of the Good is seen as the ultimate origin of all the virtues like justice, truth, or beauty (Plato, *Republic*, 508e2-3). Four classical cardinal virtues are identified in the *Republic* by Plato’s Socrates; they are: temperance, prudence, courage, and justice. He says that “clearly, then, it [virtues] will be wise, brave, temperate, and just” (Plato, *Republic*, 427e). Aristotle identifies nine virtues in the *Rhetoric* saying that “the forms of virtue are justice, courage, temperance, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence, wisdom” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1366b)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to Herodotus’ *Histories* is that of P. Mensch (2014).

<sup>3</sup> The Greek word for virtue is *arête*, which originally means “excellence of soul” (Liddell & Scott, 1968:238).

<sup>4</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to the *Republic* is that of R.E. Allen (2006).

<sup>5</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to the *Phaedo* is that of E.T.H. Brann, P. Kalkavage & E. Salem (1998).

<sup>6</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to the *Rhetoric* is that of W.D. Ross (2010).

In the *Apology*, Plato's Socrates tells the reader that human beings are compelled to pursue the Good or virtue; he rebukes the Athenians that they do not think about how to become virtuous and how to live a meaningful life; the Athenians are interested only in gaining reputation and money (Plato, *Apology*, 29d-e)<sup>7</sup>. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle tells the readers that happiness is the final purpose of human existence; he describes happiness as "an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue" (Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1097a)<sup>8</sup>. Since the purpose of man's life is to pursue virtues, to be virtuous is seen as the highest aim of human life by Aristotle. To simply live is not the purpose of human life; human beings should live a life ruled by virtues. According to Paul Hall (2004:128), Plato sees virtue as a knowledge which assures good conduct; to make life better or meaningful is to know the knowledge of virtue; the perfection of the soul means acquiring and having virtue. Hall (2004:128) argues that Plato's Socrates believes that if people have the knowledge of virtue, they will know how to act appropriately; evil acts are the result of ignorance. Winter (2011:3) argues that, like Plato, Aristotle also considers virtue as a knowledge which can be learnt; if the Athenians learn the knowledge of virtue, they will behave appropriately.

Based on the religious and philosophical explanations mentioned above, it may be argued that for the ancient Greeks the gods and moral rules are what determined human choices; to live a life according to the commands of the gods and moral qualities were very important for the Greeks. I argue in chapter two that Aeschylus has showed in the *Choephoroi* that Orestes does not have the freedom to make choices unconstrained by religion, culture or moral responsibility.

### 1.2.2 Existentialist view of human choice

While the ancient Greeks call for people to make choices according to the gods and moral rules which are outside of the human control, many existentialists, for instance Søren

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<sup>7</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to the *Apology* is that of B. Jowett (2012).

<sup>8</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to the *Ethics* is that of C.D.C. Reeve (2014).

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Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger and Sartre, call people to make choices according to their own free will. Gabriel (2010:3) considers Søren Kierkegaard as the first existentialist philosopher who argued that it is the individual, not the community or religious organization, who is exclusively accountable for giving meaning to the world. In his work *Being and Time*, the German existentialist, Martin Heidegger, argues that doing things according to the moral standards of the society is inauthentic. He says that “in everyday social life, we are estranged from ourselves and inauthentic... we fall away from ourselves, into the world and into relations with others” (Heidegger, 1962:220). According to Heidegger’s argument, people cannot find or realise themselves in or through their social roles; on the contrary, they tend to lose themselves in them.

Loftson (1998:485) claims that “Sartre’s existentialist theory drew its immediate inspiration from the work of Martin Heidegger”. According to Loftson, Sartre says in his *Existentialism is a humanism* that “man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards” (Loftson, 1998:488). Sartre’s most famous statement, “existence precedes essence”, overturns the classical Greek philosophical opinions that essence or the nature of a person is more important. Loftson (1998:489) argues that, for Sartre, there is no such a thing as human essence or a social role determined by gods or other higher authorities. Human beings are their own masters and designers of their own destiny; an authentic person according to the understanding of Sartre does not follow any predetermined moral duties; he is a being who creates his own rule, rather than presuming that he was born with one.

In *What is Literature*, Sartre points out that the function of literature is “to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility [of freedom] before the object which has been thus laid bare” (Sartre 1967:14). According to Engel, Soldan & Durand (2007:396), Sartre believes that the world is intrinsically meaningless; there is no meaning in the world beyond what meaning people give it. Therefore, the protagonists in Sartre’s drama must be absolutely free without any moral duties to be realised; they must use their freedom to make choices in order to create

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meaning in this world; they must express freedom and autonomy of the individual; the role of the protagonist is to bring to audiences the conception of freedom and suggest ways to use it.

Based on the arguments above, it could be concluded that from the existentialist point of view, human beings do not have intrinsic moral qualities which decide whether human choices are meaningful or not; they are absolutely free and must make choices according to their own free will. As a consequence, in Sartre's drama, making choices according to pre-existing moral duties as Orestes does in the *Choephoroi* is seen as a self-deceptive action by Sartre. The motivation of Orestes' matricide in *The Flies* must be something coming from inside Orestes' own desire. Chapter four gives a detailed discussion of how Orestes becomes an authentic person by making the choice of killing his mother.

### **1.3 Scholarship on Orestes' matricide and research questions**

As mentioned above, two different views of human choices are reflected in the motivation of Orestes' matricide in the two plays explored in this thesis. In the *Choephoroi*, Agamemnon, Orestes' father and the King of Argos, is murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra. Orestes returns to avenge his father. Many scholars (Winston, 2005:34; Lawrence, 2013:161; Meier, 1990:95) have contended that the motivation for Orestes' vengeance in the *Choephoroi* is primarily and profoundly moral or political. Winston (2005:34) and Meier (1990:95) discuss how the myth of Orestes is used as a way to allude to a recent political event. They argue that Orestes' matricide at the end of the play offers the audience a political solution to solve the problem of social justice. McGlew (1996:196) and Cohen (1986:131) argue that the story of Orestes portrays a political order which is tyrannical, in the sense that leaders gain their throne by force and fear. According to Kate Hamburger (1969:29), Orestes makes the choice of vengeance because it is seen as morally right in the society of which he forms part. Orestes is born with the responsibility to uphold social justice by killing his mother. In order to fulfil his duty and responsibility, Orestes commits himself to matricide. In the original plays, as Kate Hamburger (1969:29) states:

[Orestes] did not decide for himself whether his deed had to be committed or not. He was not able to act as a free man making up his own mind; neither did he as a free man freely atone for his guilt. He is acquitted over his head, not on grounds which he himself gives but in accordance with impersonal laws to which he contributes nothing.

Continuing a long tradition of reworking ancient Greek tragedy in the later eras, Sartre adapted the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus into *The Flies*. In *The Flies*, the story line of Orestes' matricide is the same as that in the *Choephoroi*, but new subjects and messages are emphasized throughout the retelling of the story. Whereas Aeschylus is concerned about the moral principles which guide Orestes to commit matricide, Sartre retells the story of Orestes by focusing on his freedom in terms of his choices (Matthews & Platt, 1997:527; Slaymaker, 1973:8; Judaken, 2006:93; Goldthorpe, 1986:77). In order to embody his existentialist views in the story, Sartre has to make a careful and deliberate change in the way of depicting the protagonist, Orestes. Aeschylus' depiction of Orestes must be adapted in Sartre's drama in order to emphasize Sartre's philosophical views. How does Aeschylus portray the motivation of Orestes' matricide in the *Choephoroi*? What has Sartre done to turn Orestes, a traditional tragic hero in Aeschylus, into an existentialist hero, and how has he done it? These are the most important questions to be examined in this thesis.

## 1.4 Methodology

In a thesis of a literary nature, the most important sources are primary sources, i.e., in this case, the English translations of the *Choephoroi*, the *Eumenides* and *The Flies*<sup>9</sup>. For that reason, I very frequently acknowledge these texts per page or verse number. However, I do not restrict myself to a Leavisite "close reading" strategy, for in the case of both Aeschylus and Sartre there are socio-political background events which have a significant influence on the respective dramas. This consideration will warrant a contextual reading of these plays, and thus, the use of secondary sources which will shed light on the respective backgrounds.

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<sup>9</sup> Alan H. Sommerstein's translation (2008) of the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* and Stuart Gilbert's translation (1989) of *The Flies* (in the book *No Exit and three other plays*) are used in this thesis.

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The second chapter of the thesis focuses on the question: what are the predetermined moral rules driving Orestes to make the choice of killing his mother in the *Choephoroi*? As mentioned above, many scholars have contended that the motivation for Orestes' matricide in the *Choephoroi* is primarily moral and political. Thus the setting of the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* was mythical, but the concerns embodied in the plays largely reflected the moral, political, and religious issues of the contemporary *polis*. Therefore, when Orestes carries out the matricide which Apollo commanded, it actually expresses a religious and moral responsibility which Aeschylus wants the spectators to follow. Therefore, the situation which the Athenians were facing in the 450s BCE and Aeschylus' political and religious opinions on the situation are important keys to understand Orestes' motivation for the matricide. In the contextual reading of the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* offered here, three historical settings will be analyzed in Chapter two: the literary background, the socio-political background and the religious background.

In the same chapter, in order to answer the research questions posed above effectively, it is also necessary to provide a character analysis of Orestes as he is portrayed by earlier authors<sup>10</sup>. Characterization is the collection of features bringing the respective characters to life. It is not just their physical features, but their mental features, their personalities and internal characteristics which make them who they are. By paying attention to what characters do, what they say, what they think and feel, how they interact with other characters and with their surroundings, character analysis has the function of determining what the writer wants to express through these dramatic figures. By discussing and contrasting the characteristics of Orestes in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides*, this chapter will investigate how the political or philosophical views of Aeschylus are embodied in his works through the vehicle of Orestes.

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<sup>10</sup> "Character", in common usage, refers to a persona played by an actor. However, it has a different meaning in Greek tragedy. The Greek word for "character" is *ethos*. According to Aristotle, *ethos* means a moral disposition or attitude which motivates an individual to choose certain actions. He defines *ethos* as "that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kinds of things a man chooses or avoids" in the *Poetics* (Aristotle. *Poetics*. 1450b). Since the purpose of this thesis is to provide a character analysis of Orestes, the word "character" is used in the sense of "a person in a narrative work", while the Greek word *ethos* is used to express one of the components of tragedy according to Aristotle.

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In Greek tragedy, the protagonist is also called the tragic hero. According to Aristotle, a tragic hero in Greek tragedy often has distinctive characteristics, for instance, he is of the noble birth and morally good; he is destined for downfall, suffering or defeat (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 50b, 1134a)<sup>11</sup>. In order to make Orestes an image of a tragic hero, what techniques has Aeschylus used to create this figure? This is the issue on which chapter three will focus.

Chapter four will place the focus on the question: As an existentialist, what does Sartre think about the motivation of the choice Orestes makes in *The Flies*? The ontological understanding of existentialism ties it to aesthetic views. The motivation for Orestes' matricide in *The Flies* must therefore be understood in the light of Sartre's broader philosophy and aesthetics. Relevant aspects of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* will be analysed in this chapter since it is the most comprehensive statement of Sartre's philosophy on human existence. It will help to understand Sartre's theoretical analyses of human choices. Chapter four also contains a character analysis of Orestes in order to answer the primary question: what has Sartre done to turn Orestes, a traditional tragic hero in Aeschylus, into an existentialist hero, and how has he done this?

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<sup>11</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to the *Poetics* is that of G. Whalley (1997).



## CHAPTER 2: ORESTES' MATRICIDE AND THE MORAL LAWS THAT GUIDE THE CHARACTERS IN THE *CHOEPHORI* AND THE *EUMENIDES*

It is observable that there is a set of concepts and moral laws that guide the characters in determining what behavior is right or wrong in the trilogy of the *Oresteia*. Vengeance is the central principle guiding people to kill each other in the *Oresteia*. In order to avenge the crime of Paris and Helen, Agamemnon joins the battle of Troy; in order to avenge the death of her daughter Iphigeneia who was sacrificed by Agamemnon, Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon; in order to take revenge for the treatment of his half-brothers cooked by Agamemnon's father, Atreus, Aegisthus helps Clytemnestra to kill Agamemnon. Now it is Orestes' turn to take revenge for the death of his father. This chapter answers the questions: Is vengeance seen as an appropriate and morally right activity in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides*? If the answer is yes, from where does this moral law derive its authority?

### 2.1 Vengeance as an old social order in the *Choephoroi*

#### 2.1.1 Taking vengeance as a morally right activity guiding Orestes' choices in the *Choephoroi*

The words and deeds of the characters in the *Choephoroi* show that vengeance is an important way, perhaps the most important way, to uphold the social justice in the *Choephoroi*; when crimes occur, vengeance is required and encouraged by the society. Firstly, the words of the chorus reveal that taking vengeance is a morally right activity. The chorus in the *Choephoroi* is made up of enslaved women. Their first appearance on the stage is when they enter the tomb with Electra to offer a libation to Agamemnon; all of them are wearing black clothes. They are deeply sorrowed by the death of Agamemnon and cite the ancient law of social justice in the *kommos* with Orestes and Electra: "Hostile words for hostile words, let it be done. One murderous stroke is paid off by another lethal blow. The one who acts must suffer" (*Choephoroi*, 310). This law is repeated again later when they say that "certainly there is a law that bloodshed dripping to the ground demands another's blood. The havoc from those slain before shouts the Fury on who brings fresh ruin upon ruin."

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(*Choephoroi*, 400-404). In their mind, blood must be repaid by blood; justice means that the crime of murder can only be requited by inflicting death in return.

At Agamemnon's tomb, the chorus claims that "the blood that Mother Earth consumes clots hard, it won't seep through, it breeds revenge and frenzy goes through the guilty" (*Choephoroi*, 67-70). It implies that the crime of murder committed by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus will not go unpunished and Agamemnon's family will definitely come to seek justice. The chorus keeps on encouraging Electra and Orestes to carry out the plan of vengeance. Different from other Greek tragedies, not only do they commend and encourage the action, but also become actively involved in the action to help Orestes take vengeance. The best example of their involvement comes when they instruct Orestes' nurse, Cilissa, to alter Clytemnestra's message to Aegisthus. Clytemnestra was asking Aegisthus to come to the palace with bodyguards, but Cilissa was instructed by the Chorus to ask Aegisthus to come alone. The chorus' involvement implies that there is a heavy social pressure pushing Orestes to assume his social responsibility.

Secondly, an analysis of Electra's prayer would illustrate how vengeance is seen as morally right in the play. Electra enters the tomb with a deeply grieving heart which is immediately noticed by Orestes when he sees Electra for the first time. She prays:

Those are the prayers I say for ourselves; for our enemies I pray for your avenger to appear, father, and for your killers to die justly in return. In speaking this curse for evil upon them, I am putting it in the open before those whose concern it may be. For ourselves, send up here above the good which we ask, with the help of the gods, and of earth, and of justice who brings victory (*Choephoroi*, 142-148).

She prays that an avenger should come, not come in any other name but in the name of justice.

From the discussions above it is clear that revenge is the only way that Orestes, Electra and the chorus know to uphold the social justice; the law of justice is that blood must be paid for with blood. Taking vengeance is therefore a morally right activity guiding Orestes to make

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his choices in the *Choephoroi*. Since vengeance is seen as an appropriate activity to uphold the social justice in the *Choephoroi*, from where does this moral law derive its authority? The next section discusses the role of external authorities in the *Choephoroi* that may have contributed to the understanding that taking vengeance is the morally superior option.

## **2.1.2 Authorities that make vengeance a principle for upholding social justice in the *Choephoroi***

### **2.1.2.1 The gods**

The most obvious authority in the *Choephoroi* which makes taking vengeance a morally right choice is the gods. In the *Choephoroi*, when Orestes and Pylades arrive at Agamemnon's tomb, the first thing that Orestes does is to invoke Chthonic Hermes for assistance. He prays: "Hermes, messenger to the dead, guardian of your father's power, help to rescue me" (*Choephoroi*, 1). It is important to notice that Orestes calls Hermes the guardian of his father's power, i.e. the power of Zeus, king of the gods. Orestes' words demonstrate that he regards what he is going to do (kill Clytemnestra) as the will of Zeus. By guarding Orestes' plan of vengeance, Hermes is actually guarding the will of the highest authority of the world.

According to Perry (2012:11), ancient Greeks believed that human beings will suffer terrible consequences if they fail to respect the gods. He argues this point with the support of the example of Socrates' trial: in his trial, Socrates was prosecuted on two charges: corrupting the young people and irreverence; more specifically, he was accused of "failing to acknowledge the gods that the city acknowledges" and "introducing new deities" (Perry, 2012:11). In the *Choephoroi*, Orestes also tells the chorus that he would suffer terrible consequences if he fails to follow Apollo's command of taking revenge for the death of his father; he says that "it [the oracle] cried out in prophecy, foretelling many winters of calamity would chill my hot heart, if I did not take revenge on those who killed my father" (*Choephoroi*, 270-271). There is a moment where Orestes doubts his responsibility and questions his obligation to Apollo. He asks his companion Pylades: "what do I do? It is a

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dreadful act to kill my mother” (*Choephoroi*, 899). Pylades then warns him that “what of the prophet god Apollo, the Delphic voice, the faith and oath we swear? Make all mankind your enemy, not the gods” (*Choephoroi*, 900). After Orestes has killed Clytemnestra, he repeats the statement again that “the inducement to this resolute act I attribute mostly to Loxias [another name for Apollo] the Pythian prophet, whose oracle told me I was to be without the evil of blame if I did these things, but if I failed – I will not say the punishment, for no one will come within a bowshot of describing its torments” (*Choephoroi*, 1029-1033). It is clear that, if Orestes fails to obey Apollo’s command, his life could be completely destroyed; he has no choice.

Another point to keep in mind is that there are indications in the *Choephoroi* that just passively obeying the gods’ will is not good enough; humans could actively seek the help from the gods if they hope to accomplish anything. For instance, Orestes asks Zeus to offer his help praying that “let me avenge my father’s death; support me as my ally in this fight” (*Choephoroi*, 18-19). Then Orestes tells Zeus:

If you destroy these nestlings of the father who made the famous sacrifice and did you great honour, where will you get the tribute of rich feasting from such a hand as this? You could never again send mankind trustworthy signs if you destroyed the eagle’s nestlings just as the royal root-stock, once it is all withered, will not help at your altars on days of ox-sacrifice (*Choephoroi*, 246-263).

In this passage, Orestes is actually bargaining with Zeus that if Zeus wants sacrifices, he must help. The chorus also bargains with Zeus, saying “listen, the one inside the palace – oh, set him over his enemies! If you raise him high, then he will be willing to make a double or triple repayment” (*Choephoroi*, 790-793). Zeus in the *Choephoroi* is asked to offer help to Orestes; in return, Orestes offers Zeus his prayers and sacrifices. This kind of relationship is actually based on contract; human beings are allowed to bargain with gods. After the gods has offered their help, human beings have to present various sacrifices in return.

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It is true that Orestes is commanded by gods to commit matricide. However, the gods were not perfect. Dempsey (2003:39) reminds the reader that the Greek gods are often portrayed as having flaws and making mistakes; they are emotional like all human beings and often display various kinds of vices. For instance, Zeus is never faithful to his wife Hera; he commits innumerable adulteries. Hera often unjustly punishes human beings because of her jealousy. In the *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides*, Apollo orders Orestes to kill Clytemnestra, but he could not exempt Orestes from being pursued by the Furies, which means that being obedient to one god does not necessarily guarantee not being hated by another. The irony is that Apollo tells Orestes that he will undergo terrible pains if he does not avenge his father (*Choephoroi*, 270-271), but Orestes still suffers horrible torments after he has actually avenged the murder. Apollo cannot prevent the Furies from persecuting Orestes. Therefore, even if Orestes has fully obeyed the gods, there is no guarantee that he will be free from suffering.

Although the gods are the most obvious authority that makes taking vengeance a morally right activity, the gods do not always interact with human beings directly. They often give their commands to people through the channel of the oracle.

#### **2.1.2.2 The oracles**

There were many ways that the gods could interact with human beings in Greek mythology; oracles were one of the most important ways for the gods to give their commands to human beings. The most explicit command in the *Choephoroi* comes from Apollo's oracle. Orestes tells the chorus that "it [the oracle] ordered me to murder them the way they murdered him, insisting they could not pay the penalty with their possessions" (*Choephoroi*, 272-275). If we look at the history of ancient Greek religions, we could understand why Orestes in the *Choephoroi* sees the oracle as an authority driving him to kill his mother.

According to Lloyd-Jones (1976:62), Apollo's oracle was very influential in the ancient Greek world. Starting from the eighth century BCE, many rulers of the *poleis* including

Athens, Argos, Sparta and even Cyclades went to Delphi<sup>12</sup> seeking moral and political guidance from Apollo. For instance, according to Lloyd-Jones (1976:62), when Cypselus, the first tyrant of Corinth in the seventh century BCE, came to power, he set up a special fund at Delphi in order to offer his donation. Marchais-Roubelat (2011:1493) argues that Delphi also offered important political guidance to the Athenian democratic reforms in the fifth century BCE. He says that “when Cleisthenes reformed the constitution of Athens during the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, he requested that the Pythia draw lots for the names of the ten tribes into which the body of citizens would be organized” (Marchais-Roubelat, 2011:1493). According to Marchais-Roubelat, in order to keep the close connection with Delphi, many *poleis* in the Greek world, such as Sparta and Lydia had representatives in the temple of Delphi. He gives an example saying that “the two kings of Sparta were constantly accompanied by two specialists whose mission was to consult the Delphic Oracle in the name of their king” (Marchais-Roubelat & Roubelat, 2011:1493) <sup>13</sup>.

Herodotus gives us many detailed descriptions of how Apollo’s oracles functioned as moral guidance in the ancient Greek world. A story of Gyges gives us an example of Apollo giving moral and ethical judgement through his oracles. In Herodotus we read that before the Mermnad dynasty, the supremacy of Lydia belonged to the Heracleidai, and Candaules was the King of the kingdom. Gyges, the first king of the Mermnad dynasty, was one of Candaules’ favourite bodyguards. Candaules insisted on showing Gyges his wife’s naked body. The wife was so enraged that she persuaded Gyges to murder the King and get the throne. The Pythia condemns the act of Gyges as morally wrong, saying that “the Heracleidai should come upon the descendants of Gyges in the fifth generation” (Herodotus, *Histories*, 1:90). Of this oracle the Lydians and their kings took no account until it was in

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<sup>12</sup> Delphi was the most prestigious and authoritative place for kings and rulers to receive Apollo’s advice for centuries.

<sup>13</sup> The influence of the Delphic oracles on political affairs was great; nevertheless it had considerable limitations. the oracle was very important for making kings, laws, and setting the moral standard. However, it could only function as consultant, and could not make its mandates legally obeyed. “It gave counsels which cities and individuals followed or neglected at their own risk and peril” (Dempsey, 2003:39).

fact fulfilled. After the oracle had been fulfilled, the Pythia said to Croesus that he had paid the debt “due for the sin of his fifth ancestor who followed the treacherous device of a woman, and having slain his master took possession of his royal dignity, which belonged not to him of right” (Herodotus, *Histories*, 1:91).

The influence of the gods and their oracles in ancient Greece, as on Orestes, is great. Nevertheless they are not the only forces which motivate Orestes to avenge his father. Why is it Orestes instead of Electra who is supposed to take the responsibility to keep the social justice? Many passages in the *Choephoroi* have shown Orestes’ conviction that acceptable moral rule in a society includes the right gender order.

### **2.1.2.3 The gender order**

The gender order is thus another factor which gives Orestes authority to take revenge for Agamemnon’s death. One of the reasons that Orestes must kill his mother is his conviction that a country is not supposed be led by a woman. This conviction is expressed when he disguises himself as a tourist to confront his mother at the palace; Orestes shows his uneasiness at having a political conversation with a woman as he does not believe that a woman should have authority over a country; he prefers to talk to a man:

Have someone with authority in the house come out, the lady in charge – but a man is more seemly; the constraints to conversation blur one’s word; a man speaks to another man with confidence and reveals his meaning with clarity” (*Choephoroi*, 663-667).

At variance with other versions of the story of Orestes, Clytemnestra dominates and carries out the plan to murder Agamemnon in the *Agamemnon*; Aegisthus is portrayed as a coward and plays a submissive role in the play. He is therefore treated as a woman and despised by Orestes, in whose eyes Argos is currently ruled by two women. Orestes says:

Many desires are falling together into one; there are the gods’ commands and my great grief for my father; besides, it oppressed me to be deprived of my property, so that our citizens, who have the finest glory among men, and honour for their heart in sacking

Troy, should not be subjects like this of a pair of women. Why, the man is effeminate at heart; and if he is not, he shall soon find out (*Choephoroi*, 299-305).

This passage shows that if a man is led by a woman, he is seen as disgraceful.

Many of the other characters also express their conviction that men should rule over women. Even the slave women in the play are convinced that women are more emotional and irrational:

But a man too bold in spirit – who is to tell of him? – or women’s reckless mind, bold all round in those passions which are partner in men’s ruin? Passion rules the female, selfishly subverting the bond which unites in shared dwellings brute creatures and mankind alike (*Choephoroi*, 594-601).

As women amongst themselves, they agree that women should be submissive to men because women’s emotions need to be controlled:

Since I made mention of pitiless wrongdoing, not inapposite too are a union hateful and deprecated by the house, and the planned designs of a woman’s mind against a husband who bore arms, a man who enjoyed his enemies’ respect. I honour a hearth unheated by passion, its women not emboldened to assume command (*Choephoroi*, 623-630).

Both Apollo and Athena express their conviction that male is superior to female in the *Eumenides*. In order to defend his argument, Apollo first refers to the birth of Athena who is born from Zeus’ forehead without a mother saying that “the father can father forth without a mother” (*Eumenides*, 673). Apollo also advocates his belief that male is superior to female in denying a woman’s right as a parent, saying:

The woman you call the mother of the child is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed, the new sown seed that grows and swells inside her. The man is the source of life- the one who mounts. She, like a stranger for a stranger, keeps the shoot alive unless god hurts the roots (*Eumenides*, 666-71).



It is true that Orestes is asked to kill Clytemnestra in order to avenge Agamemnon; however, the reason that Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon is to avenge her daughter Iphigenia who is killed by Agamemnon as a sacrifice. For Apollo, Agamemnon's life weighs more than Iphigenia's life. When the Furies question Apollo about the reason why he commanded Orestes' matricide, he uncaringly answers that "I commanded him to avenge his father, what of it?" (*Eumenides*, 201). Athena agrees with Apollo that man is superior to woman. As the judge of the case she asserts that "no mother gave me birth... I honour the male...I cannot set more store by a woman's death" (*Eumenides*, 751-54). As a consequence, The Furies lose the trial and Orestes is acquitted of matricide.

In fact, women did not have a very high place in the ancient Greek world. According to Aristotle, the social status of women was low and regarded as inferior to that of man. In the *Politics*, Aristotle says that "the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this as a principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind" (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1245b)<sup>14</sup>. In the tragedies of Euripides, female characters often express a low esteem for their own sex. According to Summer (1919:135), for example, Andromache in the *Andromache* says that "no cure has been found for a woman's venom, worse than that of reptiles. We are a curse to man."

Don Nardo (2000: 10) points out that women's stories were hardly recorded in ancient Greece; he says that "very few real women are known to us as individuals, and even fewer are accorded the dignity of a name"; they are even banned from having a public voice. Cavendish (2010: 545) states that in the ancient Greek world women were believed to be incapable of self control. The superiority of man in society was taken for granted. Men, therefore, had to dominate women and had to control female wildness by enacting rules and principles.

Based on the points made above, we can conclude in the *Choephoroi* that Orestes expresses his conviction that a country is not supposed be led by a woman according to the gender

<sup>14</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to the *Politics* is that of B. Jowett (2005).

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norms of ancient Greece. Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon and her ruling of the country have violated the gender order of Argos; Orestes has to kill Clytemnestra, also in order that the violated gender order may be restored. As a consequence, when Clytemnestra murders her husband, even for the reason that her daughter was killed by Agamemnon, she is still wrong. She is guilty not only because she has committed murder, but also because she has violated the gender order of Argos. Orestes' conviction of male superiority will not allow his home country to be ruled by a woman. This conviction is another important reason driving Orestes to kill his mother.

In addition to the above driving forces, there is another driving force which is fundamental but difficult to perceive, fate.

#### **2.1.2.4 Fate**

In the *Choephoroi*, when Orestes questions whether the oracles can be trusted (*Choephoroi*, 297), he immediately realizes that this is a meaningless question. He tells himself, "Even if I do not trust them, the deed has to be done" (*Choephoroi*, 298). It may be argued that this means: even if Apollo had never commanded me (Orestes) to avenge, I still need to do it because there are other reasons driving me to kill my mother. Orestes' answer sounds as if there is another force which is more important and powerful than gods' commands. If there is such a higher power, it could be fate.

The words "fatalism", "determinism" and "predestination" are used interchangeably today. However, the understanding of fate in ancient Greece is different from determination and predestination; different aspects are emphasized. According to Singh & Mishra (2007:534), determinism today often emphasizes a concept known as cause and effect. In their discussion of determinism Singh & Mishra say that "any outcome is finally determined by the complex interaction of multiple, possibly immanent, possibly impersonal, possibly equal forces" (Singh & Mishra, 2007:534). According to Wilson & Steiner (1999:xxi), Arthur Schopenhauer says that "man can do what he wills, but he cannot will what he wills." Based on his statement, it is not required that free will and determinism stand in contradiction to

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each other. In another words, although human beings are free to act according to their free will, the will itself is determined. Pauw and Jones (2006:86) argue that predestination stresses that all events have been willed by gods, and the outcomes are the result of the Creator's conscious choice. The future is seen as inescapable and inseparable from the will of the gods, but not necessarily due to causality.

The Greek word for fate is *ananke*. The word *ananke* in Greek, according to Beekes' etymological dictionary, means "constraint", "necessity" or "force" (Beekes, 2009:97). The word is personified in literature in Plato's *Republic*, where *ananke* is described as the mother of Moira, goddess of destiny. As Plato described it, the whorls of the cosmos rotate around a spindle, and this spindle turns in the lap of *Ananke* (Plato, *The Republic*, book X, 617b). The concept of fatalism in ancient Greek mythology and tragedy had a very specific meaning which is different from determinism and predestination. According to Solomon (2003: 446), fatalism stresses neither the necessity of cause and effect like determinism mentioned above, nor the power of god's will like predestination. In fact, the concept of fatalism is present in many cultures without reference to the gods; an example is Karma in Buddhism. Solomon (2003: 446) argues that fatalism in Greek mythology and tragedy does not have a motivation to offer any logical explanation of "how" and "why" events have happened. The events in ancient Greek literature are part of dramatic stories, not scientific or philosophical stories; scientific or philosophical stories try to explain an event by focusing on logics, but dramatic narrative focuses on the outcome which has significance for the story.

Solomon (2003: 447) argues that "fatalism is the narrative thesis that some action or event was bound to happen because it 'fits' so well with the agent's character." According to *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, fatalism means believing that "we are powerless to do anything other than what we actually do". It may be argued that this means that fatalism in ancient Greece often stresses the powerlessness of human beings to change future events.

Solomon (2003: 447) says that fatalism emphasizes that “what happens or has happened has to happen”; human beings have no power to prevent it from happening<sup>15</sup>.

Stavropoulos (2008:117) points out that fate is seen as a more powerful principle than the gods’ commands in the determination of human conduct in Greek literature. Man’s fate is not ultimately determined by the gods as even the gods have to obey their fate. No one can escape from fate’s dictatorship, not even the gods. According to Herodotus, “The fated destiny it is impossible even for a god to escape” (Herodotus, 1.91). For instance, Cronus, Zeus’ father, received an oracle which foretold that he was destined to be overcome by his own son; no matter what Cronus did to stop this event from happening, the foretold event eventually came true when his own son Zeus overthrew him and became the king of the Greek gods. According to Stavropoulos (2008:117) fate is, as Aeschylus informs us in his *Prometheus Bound*, an entity which “permits no resistance”. Therefore, if Orestes is fated to kill his own mother in the *Choephoroi*, he will not be able to prevent it from happening. Orestes should not try to outrun his fate; he must accept this own destiny. There is no escape for Orestes.

There are indications that Orestes’ vengeance has been decreed by fate long before he was even born; what happens to Orestes is something that he has no control over. Orestes is a member of the house of Atreus. Ancient Greeks believed that the House of Atreus was cursed because various family members slaughter other family members<sup>16</sup>. Orestes has no

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<sup>15</sup> However, even if human life is subject to fate, human beings are still responsible for their own conduct. We have to bear in mind that the logical way in which modern people think was not necessarily the same as the way in which the ancient Greeks thought. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1926:359), a French anthropologist, in his work *How Natives Think* differentiated two kinds of mind sets of mankind, primitive and western. The Western mind is logic. But the primitive mind doesn’t always address the contradictory ideas between fate and responsibility. By the end of Archaic Greece, there was a philosophical thinking which advocated thinking logically, but only for the minority; most ordinary peoples’ mind were still “primitive.” Therefore, people could easily accept the two ideas which seem to contradict each other.

<sup>16</sup> The first crime of murder in the House of Atreus started from Orestes’ ancestor Tantalus. In Greek mythology, according to Powell (2014:160-170), Tantalus was one of Zeus’ sons who used to be favoured by Zeus. He was so arrogant that he looked down the other gods on Mountain Olympus. One day he slaughtered his own son Pelops and served him to the gods as a feast dish. Zeus became aware of his trick and was angry. He threw Tantalus into Tartarus to suffer the most severe punishment. Pelops’ son, Atreus, butchered his brother, Thyestes’ son and served him at a banquet. In the meantime, Atreus’ son, Agamemnon, also killed his own daughter Iphigenia in order to please the moon goddess Artemis. Under the

choice and no power to escape this irresistible curse. Some passages in the *Choephoroi* tell us that this curse is regarded as fate. When Orestes asks Clytemnestra, “what, will you share my house when you are my father’s killer?” (*Choephoroi*, 909), Clytemnestra answers, “fate has some responsibility for that, my child” (*Choephoroi*, 910). Orestes then replies, “well, Fate has dealt you this death too” (*Choephoroi*, 911). In this argument, fate is used as an ultimate reason for each party to justify their actions. As long as the name of fate is mentioned, nothing else needs to be added. The Chorus’ prayer confirms that they too regard the power of fate as higher than the power of the gods. They pray, “you great powers of Fate, may Zeus grant an ending here in which justice changes to the other side!” (*Choephoroi*, 306-308). The fact that the chorus asks fate to make Zeus bring justice over to their side implies that fate has a higher authority even than the highest ruler of the Olympian gods, Zeus.

Based on everything said above, it is easy to see that because the moral law of vengeance is sanctified by the gods and fate, revenge is seen as a just activity and, therefore, people are encouraged by society to take revenge. When a crime is committed, vengeance becomes a righteous and meaningful choice for those harmed by it. However, Aeschylus presents revenge as a way to uphold justice as problematic; he represents the view that revenge is not necessarily the only way to carry out justice (see the dialogue below); society might need a new system to uphold social justice.

## **2.2 The jury system as a new social order in the *Eumenides***

### **2.2.1 The problem of revenge in the *Choephoroi***

In the *Choephoroi*, some passages give the readers a hint that the concepts of justice and revenge should be distinguished from each other. This hint can be discovered in a dialogue between Electra and the chorus:

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principle of blood for blood, an oracle from Apollo advised Thyestes that he must have a son with his own daughter and this son will kill Atreus for revenge. Thyestes and his daughter’s son Aegisthus together with Clytemnestra, Agamemnon’s wife and Iphigenia’s mother, murdered Agamemnon in order to take revenge on Atreus and Agamemnon. Now, it is Orestes’ turn to carry on the endless blood feud to revenge his father Agamemnon.

(Electra): What am I to say, explain, and instruct me; I have no experience.

(Chorus): ...pray there comes upon them some god or man...

(Electra): A judge, you mean, or a just avenger?

(Chorus): ...state it simply: someone to kill them in return.

(Electra): And I may ask this from the gods in proper piety?

(Chorus): And why not, to requite an enemy with harm for harm.

(*Choephoroi*, 117-123).

In this dialogue, the chorus suggests to Electra that she must find someone to join her to avenge her father. Then Electra asks the chorus if she needs to find a judge or an avenger to help her. When Electra here tries to clarify the difference between a judge and an avenger, she displays a vague sense or a hint that justice might be different from revenge. However, the chorus here seems to believe that justice and revenge are exactly the same things. They firmly tell Electra: Requite an enemy with harm for harm.

Similarly to the chorus Orestes does not show any awareness at all that revenge and justice could be two different things. For him, to uphold social justice means to take revenge. Even after he has killed Clytemnestra, Orestes still does not seem to realize that the old moral rule of revenge has problematic implications: "I proclaim and tell my friends that it was not without justice that I killed my mother" (*Choephoroi*, 1033). He desires to uphold social justice, but seems to have no realization that the method used may be regarded as improper.

Carrying out justice by revenge only leads to more suffering. After he has completed the task of killing his mother, Orestes stands above the bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and shows signs of starting to break down:

I am like a charioteer with his horses well off the track; I am carried away, overcome by senses hard to control. Fear is ready with its song close to my heart, and my heart ready with its dance to Rancour (*Choephoroi*, 1022- 1025).

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Revenge as a way to uphold social justice implies endless blood feuds. It is Clytemnestra's turn to seek for a new retribution now. In the *Eumenides*, the ghost of Clytemnestra says to the Furies:

On account of you, I alone among the dead lack honour. The ghosts of those I killed revile me – they never stop. I wander in disgrace. They charge me with the most horrific crimes. But I, too, suffered cruelty from those most dear to me. And yet, although I died at the hands of one who killed his mother, no spirit is enraged on my behalf... Listen to me. I am speaking of my soul. So rouse yourself! Wake up, you goddesses from underground. While you dream on I call – now Clytemnestra summons you! (*Eumenides*, 120-140).

When Orestes sees the Furies, he becomes depressed and is overpowered by a vision of the Furies, “no... They are here... Look, you women... over there...like Gorgons draped in black... their heads hundreds of writhing snakes... I can't stand it here...” (*Choephoroi*, 1050).

The story of Orestes' matricide in Aeschylus' version is meant to reflect the evolution of the legal system in ancient Greece. According to Griffiths (1991:90), before the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, revenge used to be the way to uphold the social justice before the legal system was invented. It was seen as sanctioned by god: “Embedded in the Greek morality of retaliation is the right of vendetta... vendetta is a war, just as war is an indefinite series of vendettas, and such acts of vengeance are sanctioned by the gods” (Griffiths, 1991:90). Under the justice system of revenge, murders would frequently give rise to endless blood feuds. Griffiths (1991:90) argues that, other than revenge, oral law or tradition was also used to uphold social justice before the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BCE. However, since such law was not written, it was up to the aristocrats to interpret it. These interpretations were often arbitrary and used solely for the benefits of the aristocrats.

According to Publishthis (2013:46), in response to the unjust and manipulating interpretation of oral law, the common people started asking for clear and written law codes

so that the judgement could be fair and impartial. Publishthis (2013:46) points out that Draco was seen as the first legislator who created the constitution of Athens and the law codes were posted on wooden tablets. He quotes Aristotle's words referring to "the constitution formed under Draco, when the first code of laws was drawn up" (Publishthis, 2013: 46). Written law codes offered a release from the passion for revenge by offering a more civilized means to resolve conflicts. It prevented excessive violence and maintained a better social order. The written law codes also offered the possibility of equality before the law for all people. However, as Kanyeihamba (2015:174) points out, Draconian laws were famous for their harshness and brutality; most crimes, even some minor ones, would result in the death penalty. Therefore, according to Roth (2010:10), Draconian laws did not prevail for very long; they were repealed and replaced by the laws made by Solon.

In the midst of Orestes' tragic suffering, he eventually delivers to the audience one of the most important messages in the *Oresteia*: the old social order of vengeance is problematic and should be abolished. It is demonstrated that vengeance is not necessarily the only way to uphold social justice. Since the old social order of revenge has to be abolished, the question is what new social order would replace it.

## **2.2.2 The establishment of the new social law in the *Eumenides***

### **2.2.2.1 The new legal order**

In the *Eumenides*, the answer about the new legal order to govern social justice is that it should be governed by law. As a substitute for revenge as a way to solve Orestes' case, Athena decides to give authority to the jurors who will decide whether Orestes is guilty or not:

Shall I now instruct the judges [jurors] to cast their votes acting on their judgement of what is just... Hear what I decree. Now and forever this court of judges will be set up here to serve Aegeus' people (*Eumenides*, 681-684).

In order to understand Athena's decision properly, we need to understand the historical background from which the issue of social justice arises. Croally (2007:3) argues that Greek



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tragedy was a form of art often used to stimulate the discussion of political and ethical questions in 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Athens, and goes on to say that “tragedy... must be viewed as reflecting the aims and methods of the democracy” (Croally, 2007:3). Therefore, the *Oresteia* as one of the most famous sets of tragedies was not only written for the purpose of aesthetic entertainment, but also for the purpose of ethical discussion in which the issues of the contemporary polis were addressed.

Meier (1990:89) argues that Aeschylus was trying to introduce new political concepts to the audience in the *Oresteia*. He demonstrates that Athena’s resolution in the *Eumenides* reflects the political conflicts between the democrats and the conservatives in 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Athens. In order to grasp the essence of the new legal order, it is necessary to understand the historical context within which the *Oresteia* was performed.

According to Roisman (2011:268), the conflict between the conservatives and the democrats had never stopped in ancient Athens. The 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE marks a new age for the Athenian democratic movement. It entailed the establishment of a new socio-political order based on the rule of the demos and the rule of law; old aristocratic norms were being re-assessed and replaced. One of the main political conflicts between the conservatives and the democrats in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE was the position of the Council of the Areopagus in domestic policy.

Hattersley (2011:28) states that the Council of the Areopagus had supreme power and worked mainly for aristocrats before the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. However, in the years after the reforms of Cleisthenes, the power of the Areopagus became the heart of debate. In 462 BCE, according to Roisman (2011:268), the conservative leader Cimon was sent to help the Spartans quell a helot insurrection; Ephialtes and Pericles saw Cimon’s absence as a good opportunity to attack the Areopagus. According to Aristotle, Ephialtes denounced the Areopagus in front of the Council of Five Hundred and the Assembly:

First he made away with many of the members of the Council of the Areopagus by bringing legal proceedings against them about their acts of administration; then in the

archonship of Conon he stripped the Areopagus of all its added powers which make it the safeguard of the constitution, and assigned some of them to the Five Hundred and others to the people and to the jury-courts (Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 25.2)<sup>17</sup>.

After this event, according to Aristotle, the role of the council changed; many functions were taken out of the jurisdiction of the Areopagus. Aristotle says that “the Council of the Areopagus was deprived of the superintendence of affairs. After this there came about an increased relaxation of the constitution” (Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 26.1). After the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, members of the Areopagus were still former archons, but all of them had to be investigated by a People’s court before they could assume the position. According to Aristotle, “the Archon collects the tribute of oil accruing in his year, and passes it on to the Treasurers at the Acropolis, and he is not allowed to go up to the Areopagus before he has handed the full quantity over to the Treasurers” (Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 60.3). According to Roisman (2011:270), the only functions left to the Council of Areopagus after this period were those pertaining to acting against homicide and impurity. During this time, the jury court was constituted in Athens.

According to Aristotle, Solon is the person who first constituted the jury court: “He (Solon) does appear to have founded the democracy by constituting the jury-courts from all citizens” (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1274a)<sup>18</sup>. According to him, the jurors were chosen not according to wealth or social status, but randomly by lot. Aristotle says that “right to sit on juries belongs to all those over thirty years old who are not in debt to the Treasury or disfranchised” (Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 63.3). The jurors were paid by the state, which gave poor citizens the chance to participate in state affairs:

Payment for public duties is as follows: first, the people draw a drachma for ordinary meetings of the assembly, and a drachma and a half for a sovereign meeting; second,

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<sup>17</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to the *Athenian Constitution* is that of P.J. Rhodes (2002).

<sup>18</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to the *Politics* is that of B. Jowett (2005).

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the jury-courts half a drachma; third, the council five obols; and those acting as president have an additional obol for food. Also the nine archons get four obols each for food (Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 62.2).

This information about historical developments in Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE provides valuable insight into the meaning of Athena's decision in the *Eumenides*. As a resolution to Orestes' case, Athena claims that Orestes may be acquitted for his matricide according to the votes of the jurors and the will of Zeus. The reason that Zeus also has to play a role in the decision is that the number of the votes cast by the jurors against and in favour of acquittal was equal. Thus Athena has to make the final decision by invoking the authority of Zeus, who in Greek mythology holds the highest authority among the gods. At the end of the play, it is he who makes the final decision of overthrowing the old system and replacing it with a new system. The *Eumenides* clearly indicates that the new moral law is sanctioned by Zeus.

Interestingly, Athena does not completely destroy the old social system, but integrates the old system with the new. For Athena, society needs both fear of violent punishment, like vengeance, and rational justice, like the laws. Therefore, Athena says to the Furies after she has given the final verdict:

You have not been beaten, the votes were fair, the numbers equal, no disgrace to you.  
But we received clear evidence from Zeus. The one who spoke the oracle declared  
Orestes should not suffer for his act (*Eumenides*, 800).

And "without you no house can thrive...I will, together we will enrich the lives of all who worship us" (*Eumenides*, 890).

Similarly, in Athens, according to Wallace (1989:127), although the council of Areopagus only dealt with homicide and a few other serious crimes after the reforms of Ephialtes, its reputation was still very high. According to Wallace (1989:127), the famous orator Lycurgus said in public that the council of Areopagus was "the finest model in Greece: a court so superior to others that even the men convicted in it admit that its judgements are just." Wallace (1989:123) also points out that the council of Areopagus saw fairness and

justice as of ultimate importance in the trial of homicide. The system of jury-courts ultimately guaranteed democratic rule. The political power had been distributed among the people. Aeschylus appears to have appreciated the prestige of the Council of Areopagus, as well as to prefer the democratic body to run the court.

#### 2.2.2.2 The new political order

Apart from the new legal order mentioned above, the *Eumenides* also alludes to the new political alliance, the alliance between Argos and Athens. Orestes' speech addressed to Athena reflects loyalty to the new political system of Aeschylus' time:

I am now going off home; and I swear an oath valid for all the future to this land and your people that no leader of my country shall bring against them a well-equipped army. For I in my grave will punish those who offend against this oath of mine with insurmountable failure; I will make their marches despondent and their paths ill-omened, so that they will repent of their labours. But if my oath is respected and they pay honour to Pallas' city with their alliance, I shall be more favourable to them (*Eumenides*, 762-74).

In order to understand the new political alliance, it is necessary to understand the historical background behind this alliance. According to McNeese (1999:7) Sparta's hegemony was uncontested in the Peloponnese before the Greco-Persian wars. Sparta had always supported the conservative faction in Athens which advocated a similar political system. McNeese (1999:7) states that Sparta's political system was always oligarchy with a few select people ruling the state<sup>19</sup>. They had significant judicial power which guaranteed the supremacy of the constitution. Hunt and Smith quote Xenophon, saying:

All men rise from their seats in the presence of the king, except for the ephors. The ephors on behalf of the polis and the king on his own behalf swear an oath to each other every month: the king swears that he will exercise his office according to the

<sup>19</sup> According to McNeese (1999:7), this group consist of twenty eight men over sixty years old and two kings; these thirty people were called *gerousia* or Council of Elders; five magistrates (ephors) were elected annually.

established laws of the polis, and the polis swears that it will preserve his kingship undisturbed if he abides by his oath (Hunt & Smith, 1995:61).

However, according to Anggard (2014:106), after the Greco-Persian wars, Athens became more and more powerful and the democratic faction became stronger and stronger. In the meantime, its relationship with Sparta had become more hostile. Anggard (2014:106) states that, in 464 BCE, an earthquake devastated Sparta and the earthquake caused the revolt of Sparta's slave class, the helots. As a consequence, Sparta requested help from the Athenians; the latter were persuaded by the general Cimon to send hoplites to support Sparta. However, according to Anggard (2014:107), the Spartans now grow suspicious worrying that the Athenian troops might switch sides to support the helots because the Athenians were always seeking a democratic reform in the fifth century BCE. They sent the Athenian hoplites back to Athens while the supporting armies from other city-states were allowed to remain in the area. Thucydides recorded this history in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*:

The Lacedaemonians, when assault failed to take the place, apprehensive of the enterprising and revolutionary character of the Athenians, and further looking upon them as of alien extraction, began to fear that, if they remained, they might be tempted by the besieged in Ithome to attempt some political changes. They accordingly dismissed them alone of the allies, without declaring their suspicions, but merely saying that they had now no need of them (Thucydides, 1.102)<sup>20</sup>.

This event was seen as an insult by the Athenians and caused Athens to break up the relationship with Sparta and ally with Sparta's old enemy, Argos<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> The format for references to the classical texts in this thesis: book number. line number. The translation used throughout in reference to the *History of the Peloponnesian war* is that of R. Warner & M.I. Finley (1972).

<sup>21</sup> Accordint to Tomlinson (2014:81), Sparta and Argos had always been enemies. From the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, Argos experienced a period of expanding and prosperity under the King Pheidon, which challenged Sparta's hegemony in Peloponnese. In 494 BCE, the Battle of Sepeia broke out between Sparta and Argos. Under the leadership of Spartan King Cleomenes I, Argos was defeated overwhelmingly and Sparta gained the upper hand. According to Herodotus, "vast numbers of the Argives were slain, while the rest, who were more than they which died in the fight, were driven to take refuge in the grove of Argus hard by, where they were surrounded, and watch kept upon them" (Herodotus,

According to Kagan (2013:84), after the second Persian invasion in 479 BCE, Athens had gained military power and prestige in the Greek world, which threatened the hegemony of Sparta; the Athenians now had two options available: to make peace with Persia and oppose Sparta or ally with Sparta and continue the war with Persia. Kagan (2013:85) argues that during the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE the democratic faction in Athens wanted to make peace with Persia and oppose Sparta, whereas the conservative faction tried to enter into an alliance with Sparta. Grundy (2014:157) argues that the Athenian democratic leader Themistocles believed that the main danger in future would come from Sparta and he therefore chose an anti-Spartan policy.

Athens, according to Grundy (2014:158), now formed an alliance with Argos and started building a fortification to which the Spartans objected. This alliance marks a new era for the Athenian democracy movement. It is characterized by the establishment of a new socio-political order based on the rule of the demos and the rule of law; old aristocratic norms were re-assessed and replaced (Grundy, 2014:158).

Orestes' oath to Athena in the *Eumenides* expresses his loyalty to this new political alliance. It sets him up as a moral example for the audience, encouraging them to assume their responsibility within the new social order.

### **2.3 Conclusion: Orestes as a champion of the social order in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides***

Based on the analysis above, it becomes clear that Orestes, in the *Choephoroi*, is convinced that revenge is the right and meaningful way to uphold the social justice. He fully believes that he should take the responsibility of vengeance. In the opening scene of the *Choephoroi*,

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6.78-80). Then Cleomenes massacred the Argives and burned many of them alive. "Cleomenes ordered all the helots to bring brushwood, and heap it around the grove...and Cleomenes set the grove on fire" (Herodotus, 6.78-80). Since then, Argos' relationship with Sparta had never recovered. Even during the Greco-Persian war, Argos refused to take part. According to Herodotus, Argos put forward conditions for participating in the war, that is "30 years' truce with Sparta, and joint command of the allied forces" (Herodotus, 7.148). But Sparta's reply was that "the truce is to be referred to their government; the Argive king may be a third general of equal rank with the two Spartan kings" (Herodotus, 7.149). As a consequence, Argos refused to participate in the battle.

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Orestes and his companion Pylades arrives at the tomb of Agamemnon who was murdered by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus many years ago while Orestes was in exile. He now comes back to Argos to mourn properly. However, just mourning is not what Orestes has really come for; vengeance is the real purpose for which he comes back to Argos. He is determined to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, even if this means sacrificing everything in order to avenge Agamemnon's death. When Orestes confronts Clytemnestra in the palace, the last words he says to Clytemnestra are: "you killed the man you ought not; so you must suffer the thing you should not" (*Choephoroi*, 930). After Orestes has completed his task of killing his mother, he confirms again to himself that the vengeance is just. He says, "I still have my reason, I proclaim and tell my friends that it was not without justice that I killed my mother, the pollution who killed my father and an abomination to the gods" (*Choephoroi*, 1022-1024). He faithfully keeps and pursues the moral law of revenge.

In the *Eumenides*, new social laws have been set up. Aeschylus has not given the audience many details of how Orestes obeys the new legal and political order. But the latter's promise to Athena indicates that he is now determined to pursue the new social order. He vows to Athena, "all those who keep this oath [concerning the alliance between Argos and Athens], who honour for all time Athena's city, allies who fight on its behalf, such citizens we will treat with greater favour and good will" (*Eumenides*, 775). A new legal and political order, reflecting that of Athens in Aeschylus' time, has become the new moral law guiding Orestes' choices.

What we can learn from Orestes' matricide in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* is that Orestes is a responsible person; for him, his social responsibilities are far more important than his private desires and welfare. Orestes accepts certain duties enforced by the external pressures as his responsibility; this includes pressures emanating from the commands of the gods as he understands them, responsibility for upholding the gender order and the sovereign rule of fate. He sees himself more as an element in the system of society than an independent person with absolute freedom. He identifies strongly with the city to which his family belongs. The welfare of the community as a whole is more important than his own

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welfare as an individual. Ideas of individual freedom and private life are absent from Orestes' framework. Therefore, meaningful choices are only possible when Orestes takes up his responsibility and pursues the moral laws of the society. Orestes is seen as a hero because he sacrifices his own happiness in order to pursue these moral laws. He has committed the matricide with a virtuous spirit and motivation.

It is true that Orestes is not perfect and has flaws. He fails to distinguish the difference between justice and vengeance. Nevertheless, his flaw is an intellectual flaw and not a moral flaw; this does not make him a less virtuous person. In fact, his flaw has a crucial function in the play: to make the audience aware that society needs a new law to uphold the social justice. Society calls for a reestablishment of social standards. The old law must eventually give way. Illustrating this new moral law appears to be Aeschylus' purpose in writing the trilogy, the *Oresteia*. By making a commitment to fulfil his social responsibilities, Orestes sets an example to the audiences for how to behave according to their own responsibilities in the society. Orestes as a pursuer of the moral laws is therefore portrayed as a typical model for moral behaviour.



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## CHAPTER 3: CONVENTIONS OF THE DEPICTION OF ORESTES AS A MODEL FOR MORAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE *CHOEPHORI* AND *EUMENIDES*

### 3.1 Introduction: the moral intention in Greek tragedy

Based on the analysis in chapter two, it can be said that to affirm a new social order is one of Aeschylus' purposes in writing the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides*; there is a moral intention motivating Aeschylus' creation of the *Oresteia*. In fact, some scholars, for instance Beardsley (1975:54), Harmon (2003:28), Leuthold (2010:197) and Cascardi (2014:69) argue that the creation of the Greek tragedy had moral purposes in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Athens; the aim of Greek tragedy was not mainly entertainment; it was regarded as a tool to give moral guidance to the audiences. This moral intention could be seen from the following aspects.

Firstly, as mentioned by Leuthold (2010:197), artworks in ancient Greece were often created both for the purpose of beauty and good; the concepts of aesthetics and morality were often used interchangeably. According to Leuthold (2010:196), Socrates considers the beautiful as coincident with the good. Harmon (2003:28) points out that Plato believed that an artwork had a close relationship with morality and was critical of the possibility that the charm of artworks could diminish people's level of virtue; Plato says that art "feeds and waters the passion", which "ought to be controlled if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue" (Harmon, 2003:28). Harmon also indicates that in the *Ion*, the entire dialogue is devoted to what Homer can teach a person and Socrates in Plato's *Republic* says that Homer, "in most people's opinion, was seen as the educator of Greece" (Harmon, 2003:30).

According to Monroe Beardsley (1975: 54-55), Aristotle is the first person who publicly differentiates the subject of aesthetics from that of the moral. He states that when Aristotle "turns to the art of poetry, he is determined to mark out boundaries and study the nature of that art quite independently of its moral and political connections" (Beardsley, 1975: 54-55). However, Cascardi (2014:69) argues that Aristotle still believed that the purpose of art was

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ethical; in the *Politics*, Aristotle discusses how to make use of art within the educational system of the state. He declares in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that: “every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim” (Cascardi, 2014:69). Golden (1976: 352) claims that when Aristotle talks about the function of music, he argues that different kinds of musical melodies are representations of different kinds of moral situations, and only the virtuous melodies, which will help young people to pursue the appropriate virtues, are to be used for education.

Based on the arguments above, it could be concluded that poetry as a form of art was seen as having educative effects in ancient Greece. Since poetry had an educational purpose, the aim of the Greek tragedy could also be educational; it was not created only for the sake of entertainment, but also as a tool to make the audiences morally good, to make public a proper social standard, to discuss political questions, or to criticize issues of importance in society. The *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* as Greek tragedies also had educative and ethical purposes.

Secondly, if we look at the event where the *Oresteia* was performed originally, we can see that there is a strong connection between Greek tragedy and morality in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens. According to Hyde (2011:92), Greek tragedy was originally performed in the City Dionysia, which was the most famous festival in the ancient Greek world. He argues that the organisation of the City Dionysia suggests that the festival was a part of the city’s ethical mechanism. The City Dionysia was organized and funded by the government; the festival was not a private event; it was primarily an event for the entire *polis*. The government fund sprang from a special arrangement of taxation called “liturgy”, which required a contribution by rich citizens (Hyde, 2011:92). Carter (2007:35) lists many important rituals taking place during the event showing that the festival was an instrument for the government to declare the social order to the Athenians and people from other *poleis*:

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- a. The ten elected generals (the ten most powerful military and political leaders in the city) of the city came forward to pour libations to the gods.
  - b. Every year, the members of the Delian League contributed a tribute, a sum of money, to the Athenian public purse. From 454 the tribute was brought to Athens at the time of the Dionysia. Carter indicates that this tribute was divided into talents and brought into the theatre in front of the audience.
  - c. Proclamations were made of the award of honorific crowns to individuals who had benefited the city.
  - d. The orphans of Athenian soldiers killed in battle were brought up and educated at public expense. When they reached eighteen years of age, they paraded in full battle dress in front of the audience at the year's Dionysia (Carter, 2007:35).

Greek tragedies were performed in a public theatre during the City Dionysia. The writers of the plays had to follow the instructions of the authority regarding what to write. According to Oddone Longo (1992:18):

It would be more correct to say that the dramatic author can only be located as a moment of mediation, a nexus or transfer point between the patron or sponsor [the institution which organises and controls the Dionysian contests] and the public [the community at which the theatrical communication is aimed].

In order to ensure that the tragedians had enough funds to write what the authority wanted, the government was responsible for the payment of the tragedians and the leading actors. Croally (2007:3) says that “tragedy was funded either directly by the *polis*, which paid the honorarium to competing poets, or through the system called the liturgy...” The choruses were also supported; they were paid for by “rich private individuals who were appointed by a magistrate on behalf of the city” (Croally, 2007:3).

According to Croally (2007:14), large numbers of Athenian citizens and all the political authorities attended and watched the performance of the Greek tragedies. Many tragedies,

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therefore, served the purpose of strengthening the unity of the society and reinforcing Athens' collective moral level. Croally argues that "the patron [let us call it more generally the *polis*, understood as a social institution] operates towards the public with an end in view that might be roughly formulated as consolidating the social identity, maintaining the cohesion of the community" (Croally, 1994:14). Oddone Longo also says that "the goal pursued by the sponsoring institution that organised the dramatic events was the maintenance and reinforcement of community cohesion" (Longo, 1992:18). As a consequence, Greek tragedy was not only a form of art, but also a political mechanism through which proper moral disciplines were developed in the audiences. The plays performed in the City Dionysia had to be morally good according to the standard of the authorities. The tragedies were intended to teach the audiences how to live a morally good life in the society.

Therefore, it could be concluded that traditional Greek tragedies had an important function within the ancient Greek *poleis*; it was an instrument for the discussion of political and religious questions. They were played before public crowds who were sponsored by the government. What tragedies did was to retell the stories of the traditional Greek heroes in a way that introduces a new meaning to contemporary democratic and civic audiences. The *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* as two such tragedies also have moral intention. The old Greek mythological story of Orestes was adapted by Aeschylus; by retelling the old story in a new way, the social problems of the contemporary *polis* were addressed, as well as possible resolutions. In the *Choephoroi*, Orestes believes that revenge is required in order to uphold social justice. He, therefore, faithfully pursues this moral law. In the *Eumenides*, the society calls for an establishment of new social standards. The old law must eventually give way and a new social law must be set up. It eventually becomes the new principle guiding Orestes in making his choices. It can be argued that advocating such an establishment of a new social rule is Aeschylus' purpose in writing the trilogy of the *Oresteia*. The image of Orestes portrayed in the *Oresteia* has therefore set a moral example to the audiences regarding how to behave in the society.

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Since Greek Tragedy had moral purposes, the choices made by the protagonist in the tragedy must give the audiences some moral guidance. Therefore, there are often social principles governing the choices made by the protagonist. These principles could be the cosmic order, god's command, religious tradition, or political and social order. As mentioned in chapter one, Orestes was born with social responsibilities. Meaningful choices are made when Orestes pursues his responsibility by conforming to the social rules. Orestes is therefore portrayed as a model for moral behaviour by Aeschylus. In order to make Orestes a moral exemplum, there are a number of conventions used by Aeschylus. This chapter investigates the conventions which are used to depict Orestes in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* in a manner that educates the audiences in proper moral discipline.

## **3.2 Principles of depicting a protagonist in Greek tragedy**

### **3.2.1 Imitation**

The first principle of depicting a protagonist in Greek tragedy that is discussed here is imitation. Before we look at this principle, it is necessary to consider how the spectators may have related to the protagonist in a tragic story. Paskow (1983) interprets the process of connection between the spectators and the protagonist as a psychological process. According to Paskow (1983:64), when the spectators watch a drama, they normally unconsciously project themselves emotionally onto the protagonist. The spectators feel as if they are the ones who confront the situations which the protagonist confronts in the play. Paskow (1983:64) argues that by emotionally and imaginatively suffering from the tragic events which the protagonist has been through, feelings like pity and fear are provoked in the heart of the spectators; the playwright's job is therefore to create protagonists with whom spectators can identify.

In order that the spectators could project themselves onto the protagonist, the playwright must create a protagonist who is somehow similar to the spectators; Paskow (1983:65) says:

The playwright must create a protagonist that will objectify and anchor parts of the spectator's personality to be found in both the principal ego and the counter-ego

nucleus. The protagonist must have most traits and aspirations consonant with the spectator's principal ego, or else the protagonist will be a 'mere other,' a stranger that takes no hold on him.

Lessing (1962) indicates that the reason that the spectators could project themselves onto the protagonist is that the way we can feel for ourselves is also the way we can feel for the protagonist; if we feel pity for ourselves, we can feel fear for the protagonist; if we feel fear for ourselves, we feel pity for the protagonist. Lessing (1962:179) formulates it as follows:

It is the fear which arises for ourselves from the similarity of our position with that of the sufferer; it is the fear that calamities impending over the sufferer might also befall ourselves; it is the fear that we ourselves might thus become objects of pity. In a word this fear is compassion referred back to ourselves.

As a consequence, the process of creating a protagonist is also a process of imitation. In fact, imitation was one of the most fundamental rules governing the creation of the artworks in the ancient Greek world; to paint was to imitate things of the phenomenal world; to write a tragedy was to imitate the events of human society. Plato's Socrates in *The Republic* says, "will we say, of a painter, that he makes something? ... Certainly not, he merely imitates" (Plato, *The Republic*, 598b). According to Harmon (2003:36), Aristotle agrees with Plato that artwork in essence is imitation<sup>22</sup>. Harmon quotes the following passage from the *Poetics*:

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<sup>22</sup> The interpretation of nature of imitation was different between Plato and Aristotle. Plato, for instance, advocated that art is mimetic, but he does not believe that art can accurately reveal the underlying truth. Aristotle, on the contrary, defended art. According to Harmon (2003:30), while Plato argued that we cannot fully obtain truth from the study of art, Aristotle believed that art was actually a way to present the universal truth. For Plato, idea or form is the ultimate reality and the nature is the imitation of this reality. Artists imitate the phenomenological world which mimes an original or real world. The artwork, therefore, is the imitation of the imitation. Art as an imitation is taken apart from its original; it lacks substance and utility. Plato describes Socrates' metaphor of the three beds: one bed exists as an idea made by God, which is God's idea; one is made by the carpenter in imitation of God's idea, which is the nature; one is made by the artist in imitation of the carpenter's, which is the art work. The artist's bed is twice removed from the truth (Harmon, 2003:30). For Plato, it was the idea and not the physical thing that contained essential being. As the essence of reality became anchored in the ideal realm, mimesis lost its ontological ground. Since art did not imitate form, but the physical world, it is not the

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Imitation, then, is one instinct of our nature. Next, there is the instinct for harmony and rhythm, meters being manifestly sections of rhythm. Persons, therefore, starting with this natural gift developed by degrees their special aptitudes, till their rude improvisations gave birth to poetry (Harmon, 2003:36).

Like other forms of Greek art, Greek tragedy is also based on imitation, but unlike other forms of art, Greek tragedy imitates human events instead of imitating nature. Aristotle defines tragedy as “the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude” (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449b). However, as Sifakis (2001:21) reminds us, Aristotle believes that imitation in Greek tragedy is not to copy human events accurately, but rather to adapt them. Sifakis argues that, for Aristotle, although ancient Greek artworks are imitations of the phenomenal world, the focus of the imitation is not the phenomenal world; for him, to imitate is not to copy or to mirror something; the purpose of the artwork is to demonstrate the underlying truth of the world; the artworks’ job is to discover the metaphysical reality behind the world. Sifakis (2001:21) points out that when Aristotle argues about the difference between poetry and history, in his *Poetics*, he says that “poetry is higher and more philosophical than history because poetry stresses the universal while history stresses the particular” (Sifakis, 2001:21).

Golden (1962:57), a translator and commentator of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, says:

The process of inference described by Aristotle clarifies the nature of the individual act by providing, through the medium of art, the means of ascending from the particular event witnessed to an understanding of its universal nature, and thus it permits us to understand the individual act more clearly and distinctly.

Michael Davis (1999:3), another translator and commentator of Aristotle, writes:

At first glance, mimesis seems to be a stylizing of reality in which the ordinary features of our world are brought into focus by a certain exaggeration. Imitation always involves

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imitation of essential reality. It has been twice removed from reality. Therefore, he gives first importance to philosophy as philosophy deals with form whereas art deals with illusion.

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selecting something from the continuum of experience... Mimesis involves a framing of reality that announces that what is contained within the frame is not simply real. Thus the more 'real' the imitation the more fraudulent it becomes.

Based on the viewpoints considered above, it could be concluded that since Greek tragedy does not simply copy the phenomenal world, the image of a protagonist does not need to be exactly the same as the spectators. The protagonist must have some similarities with the spectators; as a figure in the artwork, however, he must also be different from them. Orestes in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* must be both similar to and different from ordinary people at the same time. Orestes is similar to the spectators in the circumstance that he also faces dilemmas which are similar to what the spectators face in ordinary life, but he is also different from the spectators because his moral level is often higher than that of the spectators. Orestes' role is to choose and live through these difficult situations in an appropriate manner by making morally right choices; the spectator may then gain a clarified understanding of the ordinary life.

### **3.2.2 Priority of the plot**

The second principle of depicting a protagonist in Greek tragedy that is discussed here is the priority of the plot. In ancient Greece, the purpose of writing a tragedy is not primarily character development, but the understanding of the logic of plot. According to Janko (1987: 6), in Aristotle's definition of Greek tragedy, a tragic story should contain the following components: plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle. Janko argues that plot (*mythos*) is not just what happens in a story; rather, it is the structure of the story with cause and effect which is revealed in dramatic action; character (*ethos*) is another element of tragedy. In common usage today, the word "character" frequently refers to a role played by actors or actresses. However, this word, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, had a different meaning. Aristotle defines character as "that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kinds of things a man chooses or avoids" (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450b). Based on Aristotle's definition, this word was used to depict the beliefs that guide the protagonist or tragic hero to make



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different choices. The third element is thought (*dianoia*). According to Janko (1987: 6), thought is whatever the writer intends to say in the plot; it contains the themes of the tragedy. These three elements are interdependent. The last three elements he explains as follows: Diction (*lexis*) refers to the quality of speech in tragedy. Melody (*melos*) is the chorus; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action. Spectacle (*opsis*) refers to the visual apparatus of the play. According to Aristotle, plot is the most important element among the six elements of the Greek tragedy. He says that plot can “exist without character, but character cannot exist without plot, and so character is secondary to plot” (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450a).

Russell (2011:110) argues that the plot was seen as the most important element in Greek tragedy because human beings were seen as rational animals in ancient Greece. According to Russell, Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, book I, states that “the highest human happiness or well being is a life lived consistently, excellently and completely in accordance with reason” (Russell, 2011:110). Because of the emphasis on the rational quality of human beings, logic was regarded as the essential principle of plot. Aristotle defines plot as “the arrangement of the incidents” (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450a). Schaper (1968: 139) argues that in a tragic story, individual human actions are organized into coherent, logical, and meaningful elements in the plot; by organizing the actions into logical sequence, Greek tragedy could rationally guide the spectators to understand the message which the tragedian tries to deliver. When he argues about the way Aristotle uses the term *mimesis*, Schaper explains that “an imitation, in Aristotle’s usage, is no mere pretence; *mimesis* is the presentation of a coherent action, made transparent and intelligible through artistic formulation. Tragic pleasure, then, is what results when the emotional impact of pitiful and fearful events is made into a work of tragic art” (Schaper, 1968: 139).

Since the protagonist is not the focus of the play, according to Garton (1957:247), his personality and characteristics are often flat instead of round. Garton also points out that because of the length of the play, the depiction of the protagonist in the Greek tragedy is normally formal and simple. The protagonists are often driven by only one dominant

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motivation from the beginning of the play. Garton (1957:247) says that “the character cannot be viewed as an individual... This would mean that most of the information about the character centers around one main quality or viewpoint”.

Under this principle, it could be concluded that it would not have been the intention of Aeschylus to place Orestes and any other characters in the central focus of the drama. The *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* are not character-driven dramas. The role of Orestes is only the second most important element of the plays. His role is introduced for the purpose of helping the audience to understand the meaning of the plot. The plot of the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* determines what kind of personality or character is needed. Orestes’ role is to make the plot of the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* understandable. Orestes’ moral qualities must be fitted into this story line and must be connected to the cause and consequence chain of actions.

Since the establishment of the new social law appears to be Aeschylus’ purpose in writing the trilogy, Orestes’ role is to help people to understand the importance of the new social order. Orestes for Aeschylus is a person who carries moral qualities. He is merely a conveyor or a carrier of certain moral standards in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides*. He has predetermined social roles to be realised and his actions are governed by the norm of the social standard. The most important element of the plot of the last play in the trilogy, the *Eumenides*, reveals the conflicts between violence and law, primal principles and civilization, as well as old and new social systems. The plot of the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* demonstrates the social values of the *polis* as intended by the authorities. Orestes’ choices exemplify these values and guide the audiences to apply these values in their own life.

### **3.2.3 Enjoyable form of the performance**

As mentioned above, a tragic story often leads the audiences to experience pity and fear. In the real life, however, nobody wants the sad experience to be repeated; indeed people will try to avoid it and prevent the second occurrence of these sad occasions. However, the

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spectators could receive inexplicable pleasure after they have watched a well written tragedy by which they are afflicted, terrified and sorrowed. It does not seem that they are irrational when they appreciate a tragic performance. How could it be possible to have a positive response towards a miserable story?

David Hume in his *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (1753) describes that what makes audiences enjoy tragedy is not necessarily the story itself, but the manner in which the story is presented. A pleasant feeling from watching a tragic story lies in the form of the tragedy; elements, such as the use of masks, diction, melody and spectacle, all play a role in our aesthetic experience. Any painful emotion in the audience is ‘overpowered and effaced’ by the pleasure derived from our overall experience of tragedy. Hume (1753:237) says,

The extraordinary effect proceeds from that very eloquence with which the melancholy scene is represented. The genius required to paint objects in a lively manner, the art employed in the collection of all the pathetic circumstances, the judgment displayed in disposing them: the exercise, I say, of these noble talents, together with the force of expression and beauty of oratorical numbers (rhythms), diffuse the highest satisfaction on the audience, and excite the most delightful movements. By this means, the uneasiness of the melancholy passions is not only overpowered and effaced by something stronger of an opposite kind, but the whole impulse of those passions is converted into pleasure, and swells the delight which the eloquence raises in us.

In the *Politics*, Aristotle’s treatment of imitation illustrates that form plays a very important part in Greek tragedy: we are first told by Aristotle that whatever essential pleasure or pain we feel toward an imitation we will also feel toward the object of that imitation by saying that “our custom of feeling pain and pleasure in regard to representation has the same character as in regard to reality” (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1340a). Based on this statement, it seems that Aristotle tries to tell his readers that if someone feels pleasure when he views the image of something, then it is necessary for that person to feel pleasure at the sight of the very thing itself whose image he is looking at; whatever attitude of pleasure or pain we

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manifest toward the representation of an object, we will also express toward the object itself. In the *Poetics*, however, Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1448b) also says that people are many times distressed when we see some things in reality, but we find pleasure when we see the accurate representations of these same things in tragedy; people may be delighted to see the representation of the objects, but the objects themselves can cause uncomfortable feelings. For Aristotle, according to Schaper (1968:139), the tragic pleasure results from how these events are organized and presented to the spectators. Murray Krieger (1960:4) argues that a good tragic story needs a balance of different elements; the sad feelings, such as fear and pity, need to be reconciled and balanced by other pleasurable elements in the tragedy, such as the way that the play is presented; the unity of these elements gives the audiences the final feeling of pleasure. He says:

So long as tragedy remained a defined literary form, the fearsome chaotic necessities of the tragic vision would have to surrender finally to the higher unity which contained them...Thus it is that the cathartic principle is ultimately a purely formalistic one, even as tragedy, despite its foreboding rumblings, can remain a force for affirmation through its formal powers alone. Thus it is too that in the *Poetics* Aristotle rightly limits himself to formal considerations, leaving to later and less solvent generations the thematic implications of the vision which, so long as it is aesthetically framed in tragedy, is denied in its very assertion (Krieger, 1960: 4).

To conclude my remarks in this section: a good tragedy is connected with the formal structure of tragedy, its ways of unifying and presenting pitiful and terrible events, and its particular form of art. Hence, the artistic form of tragedy makes aesthetic pleasure possible by arising pity and fear. Human spectators take pleasure in the artistic form in which tragic events are presented.

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### 3.3 Characteristics of a tragic protagonist in Greek tragedy

#### 3.3.1 A morally good person with flaws

As mentioned before, an important the purpose of writing Greek tragedy is educational. The protagonist must be morally good and better than ordinary people in order to set an example for the audience, as Paskow (1983:61) put it:

Most of us view ourselves as moral, but we are dissatisfied with whatever goodness we possess. Our striving and our constant comparing of ourselves with others imply that we yearn to be better still..... In real life we look to those who can aid us in solving the personal moral perplexities that underlie our particular, day to day concerns. And that is why we also allow ourselves to be appealed to by the tragic heroes of stage.

In Aristotle's definition of the Greek tragedy, the protagonist normally conveys *ethos* which is the second most important element among the six discussed previously. He defines *ethos* as "that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kinds of things a man chooses or avoids" (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450b). Aristotle clearly defines *ethos* when he declares: "*ethos* in a tragedy is that which reveals a moral choice" (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 50b). In Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1355b), *ethos* is one of the three rhetorical strategies which a speaker uses to persuade the audience; it is an overall moral quality which makes the audience believe the speaker's reliability and integrity. According to Aristotle, "persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1355b). It seems that for Aristotle, the protagonist in Greek tragedy must display moral qualities. It has been discussed in chapter one that Orestes in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* is a morally good person; he sees his social responsibilities as more important than his private suffering. He sacrifices his own happiness in order to uphold the social order. Orestes commits matricide with a virtuous spirit, and, therefore, he was treated as a hero by ancient Greeks.

At the same time, the protagonist must also have flaws which lead him to commit mistakes and cause him to suffer. A morally perfect saint would be inappropriate as the protagonist in

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Greek tragedy. He would be too distant from actual life and the spectators would consider the story as a fairy tale. Someone who is morally deficient would also be inappropriate as the protagonist in the Greek tragedy; the latter deserves his suffering and, therefore, his suffering would not arouse pity or fear in the heart of the spectators.

The Greek word for flaw, as Stinton (1975:222) points out, is *hamartia*, which could have two meanings: to fail in some object or make a mistake; and to offend morally or to do wrong. Stinton (1975:222) argues that when Aristotle uses this word with reference to Greek tragedy, he understands it as “missing the mark” instead of moral deficiency. According to Will (1958: 512), Aristotle says that the failing is not a form of wickedness but a “missing of the mark” or “great mistake.” Will puts it as follows: “So our sympathy with an ancient hero, at least, involves by nature a love which is deepened by our doubt and distress over his destiny” (Will, 1958: 512).

What kind of actions can cause the downfall of the protagonist without being morally deficient? Stewart & McDonald (2014:145) indicate that Kierkegaard, in his essay *Ancient tragical motif*, claims:

The protagonist’s downfall is a result of other higher powers that exist beyond themselves and it is not a consequence of their proper actions. But the reasons for the tragic consequences come from the hero himself. He must also have flaws which bring him underserved misfortunes.

In his own words, Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1134a) says:

The hero must not deserve his misfortune, but he must cause it by making a fatal mistake, an error of judgement, which may well involve some imperfection of character but not such as to make us regard him as ‘morally responsible’ for the disasters although they are nevertheless the consequences of the flaw in him, and his wrong decision at a crisis is the inevitable outcome of his character.

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In *Poetics*, Aristotle divides the flawed actions into three kinds; this division depends on whether the protagonist knows the root of the problem or not, and whether the protagonist acts or not. The first flawed actions happen when the protagonist makes a wrong choice with full knowledge of what the problem is. Aristotle takes Medea as an example of a character who acts in this manner by saying that “the action may come to be in the way in which ancient poets made it happen. It may come to be with knowledge and forethought, just as Euripides made Medea kill her children” (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453b). The second flawed actions happen when the protagonist chooses without any knowledge of what the problem is (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453b). Oedipus and Orestes are examples of protagonists who act in this way. And finally a protagonist may also intend to choose with full knowledge of what the problem is and yet fail to do so (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453b). For Aristotle, a choice of the best kind occurs when the protagonist intends to perform a tragic deed without knowledge of what the problem is. This kind of choice is both pitiable and fearful. It portrays a protagonist falling into misfortune through his error which is not necessarily morally wrong.

In the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides*, as discussed in chapter one, although Orestes is morally good, he also has flaws. He fails to distinguish the difference between justice and vengeance, which eventually leads to his downfall and suffering. His flaw is an intellectual flaw and not a moral flaw, which does not deny him as a virtuous person.

### 3.3.2 Suffering

One of the reasons that the Athenian drama in 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE is called tragedy is that these dramas could arouse fear and pity in the heart of the spectators. Aristotle defines tragedy as:

The imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents

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arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotion (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449b).

Aristotle also points out that a good tragic story contains the elements of reversal, recognition and suffering; Reversal and recognition are part of the logic of the plot; the protagonist's suffering makes the action pitiable and fearful. Aristotle defines reversal as "a change to the opposite in the actions being performed" (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a), which means that the protagonist's life has changed from good fortune to bad fortune. The aim of the discussion of suffering is to provide context for arguments about Orestes' portrayal in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides*, to demonstrate how tragic action was regarded as a way to convey educational messages to the audiences. This section argues that when the spectator watches the suffering of the protagonist, pity and fear are aroused on the emotional level; it is through the suffering of the protagonist that tragedy reaches its *telos*, catharsis.

### 3.3.2.1 Suffering and moral purgation

The protagonist's suffering is necessary because it can purge the spectators who suffer disturbing emotions. From Aristotle's arguments in the *Poetics* as indicated below, it can be concluded that tragedy was used as a medical treatment in ancient Greek world; by provoking pity and fear, tragedies could purge the emotional afflictions of the audience.

In the definition of tragedy quoted above, Aristotle tells us that the purpose of tragedy is to evoke catharsis. Those who are deeply moved by pity and fear will eventually experience catharsis. The word "catharsis" is also mentioned when Aristotle discusses the advantage of music to the people in the *Politics*. He describes that some highly emotionally disturbed people, after they have listened to violent tunes, respond as if they have received some medical treatment. The notion of "medical treatment" is directly related to the experience of catharsis. Aristotle says:

Feelings such as pity and fear, or, again, enthusiasm, exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence over all. Some persons fall into a religious frenzy,



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whom we see as a result of the sacred melodies – when they have used the melodies that excite the soul to mystic frenzy – restored as though they had found healing and purgation. Those who are influenced by pity and fear, and every emotional nature, must have a like experience, and others in so far as each is susceptible to such emotions, and all are in a manner purged, and their souls lightened and delighted (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1342a).

Lessing (1962:179) argues that Aristotle's view was already supported by Plato. He points out that Plato's Socrates observed in the *Laws* that a state of anxiety or nervous excitement sometimes can make a crying child calm down; it can defeat the terror which causes the child to cry restlessly. Robert Burton in his book *The Anatomy of Melancholy* also explains that music is critical in treating melancholia. He says:

But to leave all declamatory speeches in praise of divine music, I will confine myself to my proper subject: besides that excellent power it has to expel many other diseases, it is a sovereign remedy against despair and melancholy, and will drive away the devil himself (Burton, 2002:150).

It seems that Aristotle's explanation of purgation was influenced by a theory called humourism which was widely adopted by the Greeks during the time of Aristotle. According to the 19<sup>th</sup> century work of Samuel (1833:48), this theory assumed that there are four important substances called humours existing in the human body: black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood. It was believed by ancient Greeks that a person was healthy when the four humours are in balance, but an overload or shortage of any of them would cause problems for people's psychological health. For instance, melancholia was believed by the Greeks to be caused by a surplus of black bile. In order to cure this illness, extra black bile has to be purged out. Samuel believes the homeopathic theory means that "a substance that causes the symptoms of a disease in healthy people will cure that disease in sick people" (Samuel, 1833:48).

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Just as music purges disturbing afflictions, according to Bernays (2004:329), by inducing pity and fear, Greek tragedy purges the emotional suffering of the spectators. Bernays believes that the principles of the homeopathic theory of medicine can also be applied to effect of Greek tragedy. By provoking purgative fear and pity in the spectators, the “humours” which cause these disturbing emotions are somehow purged and released; the result is a healing and *catharsis*. Bernays develops a theory of purgation in tragedy and concludes that:

Catharsis is a designation transferred from somatic to mental for the type of treatment given to an oppressed person that does not see to transform or suppress the element oppressing him, but rather to arouse and drive it into the open, and thereby to bring about the relief of the oppressed person (Bernays, 2004:329).

According to Bernays’ argument, the emotions which cause the emotional problems could be get rid of by watching a tragedy; through the performance of tragedy plus rituals and sacrifices, audiences were expected to be morally edified. Therefore, it is fairly evident that *catharsis* represents a process of purgation. It could be concluded that tragedy, therefore, by inducing pity and fear in the spectators, can discharge and clean the excess humour which is responsible for the disturbing emotions. Audiences thus experience an enjoyment because they are relieved and spared from suffering emotional pressures.

How could fear and pity become moral issues? Murray argues that Plato believed that their extremes could cause problems in society because they “reduce the courage that is necessary for being a good citizen” (Murray, 2004:24). For Plato pity and fear are often the causes of misfortunes and suffering for ourselves and others; the solution to this problem is to purify these emotions. According to Murray, this process can encourage people to be good citizens by transforming the extremes of fear and pity into virtuous habits; pity and fear are tempered into a moderate level. Tragedy, therefore, as moral purification could moderate and transform the passions for the purpose of creating social order. The goal of

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the tragedy is, therefore, to create a moral discipline in the audience's reaction to such emotions.

### **3.3.2.2 Suffering and intellectual clarification**

Some scholars, like Gassner and Golden, believe that the protagonist's suffering is also intended to bring intellectual clarification to the spectators; there is a cognitive and intellectual process involved in Greek tragedy. This argument also supports the points made in this thesis about the ways in which the portrayal of Orestes was used to educate audiences.

According to Aristotle, a good plot or arrangement of human actions includes two important elements: the reversal of fortune and the recognition of the protagonist's real situation. Recognition is defined by Aristotle as, "a change [of status] from ignorance to knowledge" (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452b). In Greek tragedies, protagonists' suffering brings pity and fear in the spectators' emotion. Gassner (1965:13) argues that "the reason that the audiences feel pity and fear is that the story is not in compliance with the expectations of the spectators". For instance, audiences normally expect that good people experience happy endings and bad people suffer. He argues that when the plot is not in line with the expectation of the spectators, they could be intellectually confused; recognition helps the spectator understand the underlying truth of human events. Gassner says:

The ultimate relief comes when the dramatist brings the tragic struggle to a state of rest... only enlightenment, a clear comprehension of what was involved in the struggle, an understanding of cause and effect, a judgment on what we have witnessed, and an induced state of mind that places it above the riot of passions can effect this necessary equilibrium (Gassner, 1965:13).

Gassner's argument indicates that by watching an imitation of the action, the confusion is swept out; Greek tragedy, by organizing random actions into meaningful events, guides the audience to grasp the meaning and order of the universe.

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Golden (1962:57) points out that what makes a play a tragedy is that its events are frightening and terrifying. However, through the suffering of the protagonist, the frightening story is transformed into meaningful and intelligible events; just like raw material being refined, the suffering refines the ordinary human activities and leads people to understand the underlying human principles. Golden (1962:57) says,

The process of inference described by Aristotle clarifies the nature of the individual act by providing, through the medium of art, the means of ascending from the particular event witnessed to an understanding of its universal nature, and thus it permits us to understand the individual act more clearly and distinctly.

Golden emphasizes that tragedy as clarification is a learning process. When the spectator watches the suffering of the protagonist, confusion is aroused on the intellectual level. By recognition, the confusion is swept away and the intellectual clarification is generated. As a result, the spectators contemplate universal and human truth.

In the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides*, it is through Orestes' suffering as a result of the matricide that the new social order is revealed. Williams (2012:126) points out that Hegel developed a theory to explain the process of the establishment of moral law. In Hegel's theory, according to Williams, the tragic hero normally affirms and pursues a righteous and just law, but in doing so at the same time will break an opposing and likewise just law. In the *Choephoroi*, on the one hand, Orestes was obligated and commanded by Apollo to avenge his father, which leads to his committing matricide. He has to choose between his obligation to kill his mother and obeying the ethics between a mother and son; both choices are just but conflict with each other. Based on religious, family responsibility, Orestes should kill his mother. However, according to his conscience he should not. Williams points out that in his *Lectures on the history of philosophy*, Hegel analyzed this pattern of tragedy: firstly, there is a conflict between two substantive positions, each of which is justified. Secondly, each of the positions is wrong to the extent that it fails either to recognize the

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validity of the other position or to grant it its moment of truth. Thirdly, the conflict can be resolved only with the fall of the hero. Williams quotes Hegel's words saying:

The original essence of tragedy consists then in the fact that within such a conflict each of the opposed sides, if taken by itself, has justification, while on the other hand each can establish the true and positive content of its own aim and character only by negating and damaging the equally justified power of the other. Consequently, in its moral life, and because of it, each is just as much involved in guilt (Williams, 2012:126).

Therefore, when Orestes makes the choice, he is both righteous and guilty.

What values have come into this conflict? According to Roche (1998:53), Hegel said:

Many tragic heroes stand for truths that are too new to have a majority behind them. After the hero's sacrifice the situation will change: that is the position of heroes in world history generally; through them a new world dawns. This new principle is in contradiction with the previous one, appears as destructive; the heroes appear, therefore, as violent, transgressing laws. Individually, they are vanquished; but this principle persists, if in a different form, and buries the present (Roche, 1998:53).

Roche argues that for Hegel, when there is conflict, it means that society is calling for a new law. The old laws are now improper and become morally "wrong"; they cause the suffering of the tragic hero and sometimes destroy him/her. The society calls for the reestablishment of a new ethical standard. Hegel says, according to Roche, "we fear the power of an ethical substance that has been violated as a result of collision, and we sympathize with the tragic hero who, despite having transgressed the absolute, also in a sense upholds the absolute" (Roche, 1998:55).

To summarize, this new moral law is for Hegel the purpose of tragedy, which is promoted by Aeschylus in the *Oresteia*. It is through Orestes' choice that the moral message of his matricide is revealed. In the story of Orestes, he eventually delivers a message that the old

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social order of revenge should be abolished; the new social order for justice should be governed by law.

### 3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of Athenian tragedies in the fifth century BCE was to offer examples to audiences about morally good behaviour that should be followed, or immoral behaviour that should be avoided. In order to reach this purpose, Greek tragedians imitate stories of human beings by putting together human actions into a coherent and logical sequence. The random actions are organized into a meaningful event which eventually reveals the underlying principles of human actions.

As mentioned above, Greek tragedy is created not to imitate human beings themselves but to imitate human beings who are in action. Therefore, Greek tragedy was not created for character development, but to bring about an understanding of the logic of the plot. It is the plot which reveals the underlying principles of human life. Therefore, it is not the intention of Greek tragedy to place the character in the central focus of the drama. Greek tragedy is not a character-driven drama. The function of the protagonist in Greek tragedy is to reveal virtues; he is seen as a conveyor or symbol of a particular social standard which motivates the hero to choose certain actions.

Since the purpose of writing Greek tragedy is to teach morality, the protagonist must be morally good and better than ordinary people in order to set an example for the audiences. At the same time, the protagonist must commit a great mistake and this error must be the inevitable product of a defect in character; the protagonist must be virtuous but have flaws. It is often through the suffering of the protagonist that tragedy reaches its purpose; suffering provides audiences with an intellectual clarification about human truth as well as purgation for negative human emotions.

In modern drama, the Orestes myth has been reworked by many dramatists, including T.S. Eliot (*The family reunion*) and Eugene O’Neil (*Mourning becomes Electra*). Continuing the tradition of reworking ancient Greek tragedy in the modern age, Sartre adapted the

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*Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus into *The Flies*. Aeschylus' tragic story of Orestes shows us the burdens of social rules based on revenge (an eye for an eye), and the advantages of a jury trial in a court of law; it is an important literary work for examining the crucial place of law in society. When the old story is adapted and presented to contemporary audiences, new perspectives and value systems are often introduced into the original story. Whereas Aeschylus was concerned about the moral and political impact of the role of Orestes, Sartre retells the story of Orestes by focusing on his existentialist point of view. In order to embody his existentialist views into the story of Orestes, Sartre has to make a careful and deliberate change in the role of Orestes.

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## CHAPTER 4: THE TRANSFORMATION OF ORESTES' ROLE IN *THE FLIES*

### 4.1 Introduction

*The Flies* is an adaptation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*; adapting old material in the field of literature is a widely recognized phenomenon. Most stories in Greek tragedy are the retelling of ancient Greek myths. Contemporary literatures are also full of references to preceding works. Julia Kristeva's (1986:37) formulation of literary adaptation is helpful: "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another". Terry Eagleton (1983:192) says that "all literary works are to some extent 'rewritten', although this may be an unconscious practice of the societies that read them." He concludes that there is no literary work that is not an adaptation. For Eagleton, adaptation is to enlarge a familiar idea or use an entirely new concept to replace the old one. Michael Worton and Judith Still express the same idea: "A text does not exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system" (Worton & Still, 1990: 1), while Genette (1997:1) says that "any text is a hypertext, grafting itself onto an earlier text that it imitates or transforms; any writing is rewriting; and literature is always in the second degree".

In modern times, literary transformation may be a way to introduce new value systems into the original hypotext. The purpose of literary adaptation is to fit classical literature into the contemporary world, to make it relevant to today's people. When an old drama is adapted and presented to contemporary audiences, new perspectives are often introduced into the original story. Transtextuality is the word used by Genette to describe the relationship between a hypertext and its hypotext<sup>23</sup>. Genette further defines literary transformation: "any text derived from a previous text either through simply transformation, which I shall simply call from now on transformation, or through indirect transformation, which I shall label imitation" (Genette, 1997:7). Northrop Frye's (1957:17) formulation, in his book *Anatomy of Criticism*, about transtextuality is also helpful: "[Intertextuality] subsumes the work of

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<sup>23</sup> Genette identifies five types of transtextual relationships: intertextuality, paratextuality, architextuality, metatextuality, and hypertextuality. Hypertextuality is designated to express any relationship uniting a text with a preexistent text.



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major authors with that of minor figures in a multiple positional typology based on relation and difference.”<sup>24</sup>

It could be observed that there are many techniques to create a transformation of a pre-existing text: make a minor character into the main character; put the story into a different century; highlight a different theme; make a serious work into a joke. There are endless techniques. According to Genette (1997:12), in Homer’s time, when the rhapsodists sang the verses of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to their audiences, they often slightly altered wording, subject or style in order to fulfill the expectations or the curiosities of different listeners. Genette points to Octave Delepierre’s thought in his *Essai sur la parodie*:

When the rhapsodists who sang the verses of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* found that these tales did not fulfill either the expectation or the curiosity of the listeners, they would refresh them – by way of an interlude – with little poems composed by pretty much of the same verses that had been recited, but whose meaning was distorted so as to express something else, fit to entertain the audience (Genette, 1997:12).

This chapter investigates the following questions: in order to transform Orestes from a traditional tragic hero to an existentialist hero, what has Sartre done and how has he done this? This thesis focuses on the relationship between the *Choephoroi* and *The Flies* and the ways in which Sartre transformed the earlier works.

## **4.2 Transformation in *The Flies* from a political drama to a philosophical drama**

As mentioned in chapter one, the *Oresteia* has political and moral intentions. Orestes’ matricide is driven by moral purposes in the *Choephoroi*. Because he obeys the moral rules required by the gods and fate, his action of matricide is justified. He is seen as a hero

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<sup>24</sup> Parody is one of the most representative artistic devices of transtextuality. The purpose of creating a parody is to mock or comment on an original work. Genette quotes Chesneau Dumarsais’ definition of parody as “with adapted meaning, a poem composes as an imitation of another poem, where one distorts in a mocking manner versed that were composed by someone else with a different goal in mind” (Genette, 1997:16). A parody can target the subject, author, and style of the original work. According to Aristotle, “By slightly altering the wording in well known poems he (Hegemon of Thasos) transformed the sublime into the ridiculous” (Aristotle, *Poetics*, ii:5).

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because he sacrifices his own happiness in order to keep the moral rule of revenge. However, the purpose of Orestes' matricide in *The Flies* has nothing to do with morality.

The understanding of the concept of meaningful choice had changed in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Western world. It was questioned and criticized by many scholars if a choice is meaningful if it conforms to moral rules. Spicker (2013:34) points out that the new ideal of individualism which emphasizes the fulfilment of individual value and worth emerged during this period. People started questioning the legitimacy of the external interference of morality upon individuals' own choices and worth; a meaningful choice had become something only for individuals and purely subjective even if it had to be achieved by violating certain moral norms. Spicker (2013:34) emphasizes that there is no collective moral rule having absolute authority over human beings; people must make individual choices which are true to themselves.

It could be observed that many existentialists believed that it was better to use art forms rather than philosophical treatises to communicate existentialist thought. They used literature as a laboratory to explore their philosophical concepts. For instance, Albert Camus published a novel, *The Stranger*, in order to communicate his philosophy of the absurd in 1942. Milan Kundera wrote his most famous novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, to explore what meaningful choices for human beings are. *The Flies* is a novel written by Jean Paul Sartre in 1943 to explore his philosophy of human freedom.

One of the most important functions of the artwork which philosophical treatises do not have is to communicate feelings and emotions instead of logics. William (1997:181) argues that the point of using art as a way to express the existentialist's philosophical ideas is that certain existentialist attitudes such as anguish, authenticity or bad faith could be better explained in the form of literature; every artwork expresses artists' existentialist attitude towards the world. This is why many existentialists regard certain writers as equals to philosophers. According to William (1997:182), the human being is a "revealer" instead of

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an imitator. Existentialist art does not imitate pre-existing rules, but creates and expresses a new meaning; it is an expression of a unique subjectivity, an expression of individuality.

It is important to note that *The Flies* was written when Paris was occupied by Germany, a time when Sartre was involved in the movement called the *Resistance*. Therefore, several scholars (Cohen-Solal, 2005:125; Detmer, 1988:172; Gerassi, 1989:168) believe that there are strong anti-Nazi concerns in Orestes' matricide. For these scholars, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus represent the Vichy government of France which worked in partnership with the Nazi power; by killing them, Orestes delivers an anti-Nazi message. Judaken (2006:93) and O'Donohoe (2005:67) argue that when Orestes eventually liberates the city of Argos by killing his own mother, he reveals that it is permissible to commit a horrifying crime in order to overcome the power which enslaves people.

The central theme of overthrowing unjust Nazi authority is undoubtedly suggested in the play. However, in an era of Nazi dominance, its anti-Nazi subject had to be concealed or only vaguely revealed: as Andrew Ryder (2009:82) says, "Sartre's work is hardly unambiguously anti-fascist, but rather a polyvalent work that could be read in different ways by different groups." According to Ryder (2009:82), while people who supported the resistance movement would have been able to recognize the anti-Nazi message, the Nazis would only have been able to recognize the philosophical message of Orestes' matricide. Several of Sartre's philosophical ideas about human existence have been discovered in the play by different scholars. Cheema (2009:114) argues that Orestes is a lost prince in *The Flies*. He comes back to Argos in order to find his own identity; his crime of murder is prompted by his seeking for his own identity. George Ross Ridge says that Orestes' matricide in *The Flies* indicates that "a man of reflection has become a man of meaningful action by which his actions are not simply gratuitous" (Ridge, 1957: 435). According to Ridge, this is what *The Flies* is chiefly about: challenging the spectators to examine their life to see if they have fallen into self-deception and to encourage them to explore their world according to their own individuality.

Scholarly consensus affirms that the most important message Sartre is trying to deliver in *The Flies* is his philosophical ideas on human freedom. It is well known that for Sartre, the world is absurd; there is no inherent standard in the world; each individual, not society or religion, is solely responsible for making the choices for his own life. Therefore, one of the purposes of Sartre's literary work is to encourage human beings to take responsibility of freedom and make authentic choices in the world around them. Sartre wrote in *What is Literature* that "the writer has chosen to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility before the object that has been thus laid bare" (Sartre, 1988:38).

To conclude: although *The Flies* has a specific bearing to the political environment of the time, Sartre also expresses his philosophical convictions in the play. Revenge as the main purpose of Orestes' matricide in the *Choephori* has been replaced by the desire of making an authentic choice.

### **4.3 Orestes, from a person burdened with moral responsibility to an absolutely free person**

In order to understand Orestes' matricide in the *The Flies*, it is crucial to explore Sartre's understanding of humanity which has been best expressed in his work *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. He incorporates the philosophical ideas of this book into the *The Flies*. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the philosophical ideas in *Being and Nothingness*<sup>25</sup>.

#### **4.3.1 Sartre's understanding of freedom and its responsibilities**

In order to understand Sartre's portrayal of Orestes in *The Flies*, it is necessary to understand Sartre's philosophy of human freedom and its responsibility. Greek philosophers, like most other essentialists, did not distinguish existence from essence. However, Sartre (1992:72) believed that existence is a different philosophical concept from essence; he also

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<sup>25</sup> All philosophical statements of Sartre's theory of humanity mentioned in this section are a summarization of this book.

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distinguishes the existence of human beings from the existence of other things and develops a theory of humanity called existence-precedes-essence. This means that human beings do not possess any pre-existing nature or essence; they exist first and then choose the way they want to live, which eventually determines who they are or what their essence is.

Sartre's theory that existence precedes essence is based on his understanding of human consciousness. For Sartre (1992:127), there are two forms of being: human consciousness [being-for-itself] and everything which is outside human consciousness [being-in-itself]. Human consciousness is defined as the ability to reflect on something including itself and others. Sartre (1992:28) believes that consciousness is not only consciousness of its objects; it is also consciousness of itself. This is why Sartre calls the consciousness being-for-itself, which refers only to human beings; being-in-itself refers to the objects of consciousness.

The notion of nothingness plays a crucial role in Sartre's theory of existence-precedes-essence. According to Sartre (1992:127), consciousness has to be consciousness of something; without something to be conscious of, being-for-itself cannot exist. For him, human consciousness is not a substance; it by itself is nothing. Sartre's notion of nothingness is different from the traditional understanding. For Sartre (1992:38), nothingness does not mean non-existence; nothingness itself is a phenomenon of existence; it is as real as "something". He explains that one cannot experience "nothingness" without first expecting some possibilities. Sartre claims that "it is evident that non-being always appears within the limits of a human expectation" (Sartre, 1992:38). For instance, when a person walks into a library in which there are no books but only shelves and tables, he would say: there is nothing in the library. However, if the place where this person walked into is a classroom with only shelves and tables, he would not say that this room was empty. In the first case, this person says that there is nothing because he expects there should be books in the library. This means that one cannot experience the absence of something if one has not expected it to be there first. Therefore, nothingness for Sartre does not mean non-existence, it means absence of something; when he says that consciousness itself is

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nothing, he does not mean the negation of consciousness, but the absence of the essence of consciousness.

Therefore, according to Sartre (1992:72), consciousness first exists but it is by itself nothing or without any pre-determined essence. Since consciousness does not possess any essence, it has freedom to give essence or meaning to itself. Human beings are free to give meaning to their own life. In fact, for Sartre (1992:83), to exist is to define oneself; to define itself is to be free; existence itself is freedom. Just like human beings cannot choose whether they exist or not, they cannot choose whether they are free; human beings are not free to not be free. Judaken and Bernasconi, (2013:267) claims that “human beings do not have the freedom of choosing whether or not they are free, they simply are free.” According to Judaken and Bernasconi (2013:268), Sartre puts it more dramatically by saying that, in Sartre’s view, “we are condemned to freedom..., thrown into freedom.” Therefore, for Sartre, freedom and responsibility are two sides of the same coin; freedom is both the ability and responsibility to give meaning to human beings and the world; it is the driving force of the consciousness. Loftson indicates that Sartre says in his *Existentialism is a humanism*, “man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards” (Loftson, 1998:488). In order to define himself, the human being must be free.

Different from the commonplace, Sartre does not care whether freedom can help the existential hero to achieve his desire; he cares about whether the person will take the responsibility of the freedom to make the choice. Sartre (1992:621) defines freedom as “to obtain what one has wished, but by oneself to determine oneself to wish; in other words, success is not important to freedom.” He says:

Never have we been as free as during the German occupation... Since the Nazi venom snuck even into our thoughts, every correct thought was a conquest; since an all-powerful police tried to keep us silent, every word became precious like a declaration of principle; since we were watched, every gesture had the weight of a commitment... the very cruelty of the enemy pushed us to the extremity of the human

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condition by forcing us to ask the questions which we can ignore in peacetime (Sartre, 1992:621).

Sartre's understanding of human freedom is expressed in the atmosphere of the Argos he depicts and the description of Orestes' self-identity in *The Flies*.

#### **4.3.2 Portraying a city with no freedom: Argos as a dark city**

In order to express his theme of freedom, Sartre firstly introduces the atmosphere of Argos in order to make people feel the darkness of a city without freedom. He depicts this place in which people are controlled by morality as a dark and depressing city. In the beginning of the play, Orestes, accompanied by The Tutor, arrives in Argos, standing in the public square. Sartre spends long passages to describe the atmosphere in Argos (*The Flies*, 1.1.2-1.1.10) <sup>26</sup>: There is a statue of Zeus, god of flies and death. Zeus is the antagonist in *The Flies* who is all powerful and fear-inspiring; his statue is described as having white eyes and blood-smeared cheeks. His white eyes are a symbol of judgment: whatever the Argives do, they are being watched by the eyes of Zeus. The blood-smeared cheeks seem to be warning the Argives that they must not rebel; otherwise they will have to face the bloody punishment. His image is more of a monster than a god.

A procession of old women enters in black clothes. They make libation to the statue. Black clothes in the *Choephoroi* are a symbol of grief, but in the *The Flies*, it seems rather to tell the reader how miserable the people are. When The Tutor tries to ask the old women for directions, they drop their urns and run away in fear. The Argives are constantly in guilt and fear (*The Flies*, 1.1.50). They are like prisoners. The flies swarm around each of the citizens and constantly remind the people of their guilt regarding Agamemnon's murder. Later on when Zeus enters the city, a citizen falls on Zeus' knees and confesses, "Stink, oh, how I stink! I am a mass of rottenness. See how the flies are teeming round me, like carrion crows... born through my flesh to my black heart. I have sinned a thousand times; I stink of

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<sup>26</sup> The format of the citations follows: Act. Scene. Line. The citations come from the translation by Stuart Gilbert, published by Vintage Books in 1989.

ordure and reek to heaven” (*The Flies*, 2.1.28). Also through other descriptions of unfriendly people, smelly flies, the idiot boy, the screaming and the heat of the sun, Argos is depicted as a gloomy, dreary and foreboding city.

In this city, the mourning ceremony of the dead is about to take place. Every citizen of the city has been contaminated with guilt by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra because of the murder of Agamemnon (*The Flies*, 1.1.81). They will have to spend all day mourning, repenting, and wailing<sup>27</sup>. The purpose of the ceremony of the dead is to reinforce the guilt of the citizens. Aegisthus keeps on recalling people’s sin and reminds them that they are guilty and must repent; they ought to feel guilty because they condoned the murder of Agamemnon, he says: “dogs! How dare you bewail your lot? Have you forgotten your disgrace? Then, by Zeus, I shall refresh your memories” (*The Flies*, 2.1.20).

Although these moral and religious convictions come from the authorities, the citizens in Argos have internalized these moral laws and are convinced that they deserve the guilt; they are willingly enslaved. The Argives have tolerated the rule of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus; therefore the people here are mentally enslaved. The people of Argos allow the past event of the murder of Agamemnon to determine who they are. Orestes therefore calls them half human creatures:

Then these blood-smeared walls ... and all those half-human creatures beating their breasts in darkened rooms, and those shrieks ... can it be that Zeus and his Olympians delight in these? (*The Flies*, 1.1.67).

He is horrified by what he has seen: “Squeals of terror everywhere, people who panic the moment they set eyes on you, and scurry to cover, like black beetles, down the glaring streets (*The Flies*, 1.1.2).

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<sup>27</sup> In reality, North Korea is an example of the mass mourning for the death of leaders. When Kim Jong- il died at the end of year 2011, a population of 24 million, including workers, academics and soldiers were organized by the authorities to express their mourning on the day of his death.



Although people are doing things according to Zeus' will, ironically, Zeus never respects his slaves; he dehumanizes them saying:

See that old creature over there, creeping away like a beetle on her little black feet, hugging the walls. Well, she's a good specimen of the squat black vermin that teem in every cranny of this town. Now watch me catch our specimen, it's well worth inspection. Here it is. A loathsome object, you'll agree (*The Flies*, 1.1.46).

The reason that those he controls are seen as sub-human by him is that Zeus knows that freedom is the essence of human consciousness. Zeus says, "once freedom lights its beacon in a man's heart, the gods are powerless against him" (*The Flies*, 2.2.112).

The atmosphere in Argos described by Sartre is designed to make the audiences feel the tone of the whole play: Argos looks like a plague ridden city. As mentioned above, Gerassi (1989:168) points out that *The Flies* was written when Paris was occupied by Germany and there are strong anti-Nazi concerns in the play. Sartre may therefore be said to describe a miserable life which is bound by rigid systems of religion and politics. He shows that political and religious authorities have imprisoned people in fear and prevent them from being free.

However, as mentioned above, although *The Flies* has a specific bearing to the political environment of the time, the main purpose of the play is to express Sartre's philosophical convictions. Thus, the situation that Orestes is facing presents a collective human situation: many people are mentally enslaved. It is important to know that Sartre, according to his philosophy of freedom, is not condemning Zeus' value system *per se*; what he condemns is that the authority imposes his value system on other people.

#### **4.3.3 Stripping Orestes' pre-determined responsibility**

Sartre's understanding of human freedom is also expressed in Orestes' self-identity in *The Flies*. Like Orestes in the *Choephoroi*, Orestes in *The Flies* is Agamemnon's son; his father was murdered by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. As Agamemnon's son, Orestes in the

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*Choephoroi* is obligated to revenge his father. However, it is not true in *The Flies*. Orestes in *The Flies* is presented as a free person. His predetermined social responsibilities have been stripped away.

When he arrives, Orestes in *The Flies* has no thought of revenge. To The Tutor's remark, "I wondered if you weren't hatching some wild scheme to oust Aegisthus and take his place" (*The Flies*, 1.1.103), Orestes answers, "To oust Aegisthus, ah... no, my good slave, you need not fear" (*The Flies*, 1.1.104). Zeus also recognizes that Orestes is different from the citizens of Argos when they first meet. He says to Orestes, "you cannot share in their repentance, since you did not share their crime. Your brazen innocence makes a gulf between you and them" (*The Flies*, 1.1.59). People in Argos are enslaved by guilt, but Orestes is free from it.

Orestes frequently expresses himself in terms of "free": he is light and free; he has no responsibility. Orestes says, "memories are reserved for people who own houses, cattle, fields, and servants. Whereas I – I am free as air, thank God! My mind is my own" (*The Flies*, 1.1.97). Firstly, Orestes is free because he does not have any inherent identity. He also calls himself a stranger and traveller: "I was born here, and yet I have to ask my way, like any stranger" (*The Flies*, 1.1.5). When he arrives at the palace, he repeats again that to be Agamemnon's son means nothing to him:

This is my palace, my father's birthplace ... I, too, was born here ... And yet I have no memories, none whatever. I am looking at a huge, gloomy building, solemn and pretentious in the worst provincial taste. I am looking at it, but I see it for the first time (*The Flies*, 1.1.93).

Further, Orestes is free because he does not have to submit to any authorities. Unlike Orestes in the *Choephoroi* who is a follower and advocator of the gods including Apollo and Zeus, Orestes in *The Flies* does not come under the authority of Zeus. Orestes defines Zeus as only a traveler like himself and The Tutor. Since Zeus is only a traveler, there is no question that he does not have control over Orestes' life. Zeus eventually accepts that, "once

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freedom lights its beacon in a man's heart, the gods are powerless against him" (*The Flies*, 2.2.112).

It is true that Orestes' father was murdered when he was still an infant. Orestes cannot change what has happened in the past. However, he can choose what that event means to himself. That a tragic event happened in his childhood does not mean that he will grow up resentful and bitter. In Sartre's eyes, the fact of Agamemnon's death should not have any intrinsic meaning for Orestes, only Orestes himself can decide what the event means to him. As remarked above, Bernasconi points out that Sartre says: "We were never more free than during the German occupation" (Bernasconi, 2014:51). Freedom is absolute, no matter what situation people are involved in.

Because the way Orestes identifies himself has been changed, Orestes in *The Flies* is presented as a free person. Since his predetermined social responsibilities have been stripped away by Sartre, the motivation of Orestes' matricide must therefore be different from his motivation in the *Choephoroi*.

#### **4.3.4 Changing the motivation of the matricide**

In order to understand the motivation of Orestes' matricide in *The Flies*, it is necessary to first understand Sartre's concept of authenticity. According to Gardner (2009:115), Sartre distinguishes between freedom-from and freedom-to. Freedom-from refers to the liberation from restrictions, e.g., legal, social, or political restrictions. This is the first step for Sartre's theory of freedom. When a person is free from the restrictions, he often feels empty and anxious unless the freedom-from goes along with a creative action, freedom-to, which means the person must make use of his freedom to make creative choices. For Sartre (1992:765), the meaning of life is not given, and must be achieved by making choices. For Sartre, making choices is the way to connect the consciousness and the world. The meaning of life is nothing but the choice made by consciousness. Freedom-to drives people to engage to the world and choose the way we interpret and act upon it. It is through the action of

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making choices that the meaning of life and the identity of the individual is created. Authenticity is the rule which governs people to make choices (Sartre, 1992:129).

#### **4.3.4.1 Sartre's understanding of authenticity**

##### **4.3.4.1.1 What authenticity is not for Sartre**

Firstly, authenticity is not sincerity. According to Hegel (2002:515), a sincere person is someone who wholeheartedly follows what he ought to do and never thinks of violating his responsibility. Sincerity is synonymous with the concepts of truthfulness and honesty. It is people's willingness to immerse themselves into social norms. Hegel says that "a sincere person is seen as someone who passively internalizes a particular conventional social ethos; the individual is uncritically obedient to the power of society" (Hegel, 2002:515). For Hegel, sincerity leads to the conformity of individuals to the collective standard making individuals accept a given moral law; a sincere person can do what he wills, but he cannot will what he wills. In other words, although a sincere person is free to act according to a motive, the nature of that motive is determined by the social norm.

In contrast, authenticity often requires an individual to be true to himself or herself for his or her own benefit even if it means violating the social order or dominant public ideologies (Sartre, 1992:128). For most existentialists, the concept of sincerity eventually has to be replaced by the existentialist concept of authenticity.

Secondly, authenticity is not autonomy. According to Hague (2009:45), the concept of autonomy emphasizes that individuals are free from being manipulated; an autonomous person has the ability to act on the basis of his own decisions; he is a self-governing person who makes decisions according to his own rational endorsement. To a degree, authenticity is in harmony with autonomy in supporting that one should govern his own life instead of being governed by others (Hague, 2009:45). However, according to Sartre (1992:128), one vital difference is that authenticity emphasizes that people's consciousness, motives and intentions should outweigh rational deliberation. Those motives and intentions are believed

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to be more fundamental to the cohesion of one's own identity. People could live a life with autonomy but fail to be faithful to their own identity.

#### **4.3.4.1.2 What authenticity is for Sartre**

Several existentialists (Kierkegaard, 1992:130; Heidegger, 1962:220) tried to define the concept of authenticity in relational terms. Kierkegaard defines authenticity as to “become what one is” (Kierkegaard, 1992:130). For Kierkegaard, one can only become what one is when you find a true personal relationship with God instead of just passively following some religious tradition. An authentic choice must include a leap of faith based on a true personal experience.

Heidegger expresses his understanding of the conception of authenticity in the book *Being and Time*. Authenticity for him is to be the author of our own life, to own what we are; it is the extent to which one is true to oneself, regardless of external pressures. If people allow society to decide what kind of life they ought to have, they are inauthentic. In fact, people tend to lose themselves in their social roles: “In everyday social life, we fall away from ourselves, into the world and into relations with others” (Heidegger, 1962:220).

Bell (1989:45) argues that for Sartre, consciousness itself is nothing and absurd. Bell says that “one might thus conclude that there is no way to be true to what one is, because there is nothing that one is” (Bell, 1989:46). For Bell, authenticity would be “the awareness and acceptance of this basic ambiguity” (Bell, 1989:46). It will be appropriate to say that Sartre defines authenticity as what-it-is-not instead of what-it-is. For Sartre (1992:129), an authentic person does not have a predetermined nature or essence to be realised; the meaning of life does not come from pursuing a moral law or social order. Doing things according to a fixed moral law like the characters in Greek tragedy Sartre sees as an inauthentic choice. The moral act is inauthentic because it is performed for the sake of duty.

To sum up the analysis above: authentic people must create their own essence according to their own choices. Sartre does not deny the existence of social order; he wants to make sure that people do not act because they have to. However, people can do the exact same thing

authentically if they do it because they use their freedom to choose to do it. Authenticity for Sartre is not a matter of introspection which tests if the human behaviour is in conformity with certain set moral standards. Instead, it is a passionate commitment through which one creates your own meaning in the world.

A Chinese proverb may be used as an illustration: there was no original path in the world; the place people had walked through became the path. This proverb is saying that the path did not exist; it is the action of walking that has created the path. Just like the path is seen as the footmarks left by walking, people's identity or the meaning of life is also only the "footmarks" of the action. People must fully commit themselves to their choices with firmness and full dedication.

#### **4.3.4.2 Orestes' authentic choice in *The Flies***

Based on Sartre's understanding of authenticity, if the purpose of writing the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* is to teach the audiences how to live a proper life in the *polis*, it could be said that the purpose of writing *The Flies* is to show the audiences how to live an authentic life. If a character performs an action in accordance with duty or morality, the act is seen as inauthentic by Sartre; but the character can do the same thing authentically if he or she acts on the basis of an own choice. Therefore, the possibility exists of only changing the motivation for Orestes' matricide in *The Flies* in order to portray his choice as an authentic choice.

In the beginning of *The Flies*, Orestes is free, but he is only free from restrictions. He is not forced to do things and he is free from revenge and remorse. However, in Sartrian terms, just "free from" is not real freedom. The Tutor reminds him that he still needs to make use of his freedom. According to Sartre, "free from" is liberating and also horrifying (Sartre, 1992:65). Orestes describes the experience as follows; "what emptiness! What endless emptiness, as far as the eyes can reach" (*The Flies*, 2.1.163). "No hatred, but no love either... Who am I, and what have I to surrender?" (*The Flies*, 2.1.142). This illustrates Sartre's belief that the world is absurd and meaningless, but that human freedom always

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attempts to seek meaning (Sartre, 1992:82). When human freedom is confronted with the meaningless world, the human feels emptiness or anguish (Sartre, 1992:83). Sartre used an example in *Being and Nothingness* that when walking along a cliff, you would feel anguish to know that you have the freedom to throw yourself down to your imminent death. Lamm quotes Sartre's very well-known words: "human life begins on the far side of despair" (Lamm, 2010:128).

Although Orestes has realized his own freedom, he still yearns for a connection with Argos. He says:

A king should share in his subjects' memories... If there were something I could do, something to give me the freedom of the city; if, even by a crime, I could acquire their memories, their hopes and fear, and fill with these the void within me, yes, even if I had to kill my own mother (*The Flies*, 1.1.105).

Orestes' yearning for the connection with Argos is revealed more explicitly when he asks Electra to accept him as her brother: "It's my one chance, and you, Electra – surely you won't refuse it to me? Try to understand. I want to be a man who belongs to some place, a man amongst comrades" (*The Flies*, 2.1.278).

Orestes needs to reach the stage of "free to". He feels that his life is meaningless because he has not committed himself to anything yet. The Tutor describes Orestes' state of "free from":

So along with youth, good looks, and wealth, you have the wisdom of far riper years; you mind is free from prejudice and superstition; you have no family ties, no religion, and no calling; you are free to turn your hand to anything. But you know better than to commit your self – and there lies your strength (*The Flies*, 1.1.96).

Orestes, however, is looking for the meaning of life. He says:

Some men are born bespoken; a certain path has been assigned them, and at its end there is something they must do, a deed allotted. So on and on they trudge, wounding

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their bare feet on the flints. I suppose that strikes you as vulgar – the joy of going somewhere definite (*The Flies*, 1.1.97).

He has realized that being pathless is not good; he wants to commit himself to a path; he sees this as something joyful. Orestes wants to commit to something which can give meaning to his life. However, he has to find the way by himself, no one else could help him. The Tutor's complaint hints at this truth: "A hundred times and more I've had to ask our way, and never once did I get a straight answer" (*The Flies*, 1.1.26).

Orestes has come under the impression of how the town of Argos is enslaved by fear and remorse. He decides to make a commitment to give them freedom. Thus, giving freedom to people in Argos is the idea he wants to commit to. He chooses to "take a burden on [his] shoulders, a load of guilt so heavy as to drag [him] down, right down into the abyss of Argos" (*The Flies*, 1.1.105). Unlike the matricide in the *Choephori*, Orestes' choice in *The Flies* is not a moral choice, but an existentialist choice. The choice comes from his own desire, not any pressure from outside. When Orestes chooses to stay in Argos and free his people, he has now chosen a fundamental project to give meaning to his own life. And therefore, he has started creating his own identity. That this momentous occasion for Orestes has been manifested physically is illustrated by Electra's remark: "Oh, how you have changed!.. Your eyes have lost their glow; they are dull and smouldering. You were so gentle" (*The Flies*, 2.1.170). But a further step is necessary; Orestes also has to avoid bad faith – self deception.

#### 4.3.4.3 Avoiding bad faith

In terms of Sartre's existentialist framework, only to make a choice is not enough; Orestes must act and persevere on the chosen course. Otherwise, Orestes will fall into bad faith<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> According to *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, bad faith is "a philosophical concept used by existentialist philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir to describe the phenomenon where a human being under pressure from social forces adopts false values and disowns their innate freedom hence acting inauthentically" (Childers & Hentzi, 1995:103).



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Orestes is certain of his choice. When Orestes is tortured by the Furies, Zeus tries to seduce and persuade him to fall into bad faith, saying:

See these planets which roll round in order, without ever bumping into each other; it is I who ordained their course, according to justice ... by me the species perpetuate themselves. I ordained that man should always beget a man, and that the offspring of a dog should be a dog. By me the soft tongue of the tides comes to lick the sand and then withdraws at its fixed time (*The Flies*, 3.1.230).

But Orestes defies him: “You are the king of the gods, Zeus, the king of stones and stars, the king of waves and of the sea. But you aren’t the king of men” (*The Flies*, 3.1.231).

This is, however, not true for Electra. When Orestes first meets Electra, she is very clear about what she wants. She desires to avenge her father and has refused to join the mourning ceremony (*The Flies*, 2.1.113). Electra does not believe that Zeus is all powerful. She says that Zeus’s statue is only made of wood and should be set fire to. She desires freedom. When she learns that Orestes comes from Corinth, she asks if the Corinthians also live a life of remorse and guilt. She tells Orestes that she does not believe in remorse; there is only hatred in her heart.

However, she does not take responsibility for her desire of being free. She thinks it is someone else’s responsibility; she says that “someone else will come, to set me free” (*The Flies*, 2.1.119). Destiny is the idea guiding her decisions and actions. She believes that she is fated to take revenge because she is a member of the house of Atreus. As she tells Orestes, “you are a grandson of Atreus, and you cannot escape the heritage of blood ... Fate will come and hunt you down in your bed” (*The Flies*, 2.1.125). Electra desires revenge, but it is only a dream. She does not have the courage to act on it. When she and Orestes confront Clytemnestra, she tries to stop Orestes from killing her by saying, “[Clytemnestra] can do no more harm” (*The Flies*, 2.2.98).

Things get worse after Electra and Orestes have murdered Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. After the matricide has been committed, Electra and Orestes flee to Apollo asking for

sanctuary. Electra becomes fearful and repudiates her crime; she falls into bad faith. Zeus says to her: “I know you nursed bloodthirsty dreams, but there was a sort of innocence about them ... you never really thought of making them come true ... you were haunted by the cruel destiny of your race ... you never willed to do evil ...” (*The Flies*, 3.1.96-8). Electra gives up her freedom and accepts Zeus’ moral law by saying, “yes, yes, I am beginning to understand” (*The Flies*, 3.1.9).

In the end Electra accepts the moral law which is imposed by Zeus and gives up her own freedom. She allows Zeus to bind her under the moral law that her murder is a crime. She has become like all the people in the city repenting her crime. While Orestes has made the authentic choice and become an existentialist hero, Electra has become a slave like all other Argives.

#### **4.4 Transformation of the art form - from plot driven theatre to the theatre of situations**

As mentioned previously, William (1997: 181) points out that, because of the emphasis on the freedom of human consciousness, the existentialist artwork is per definition highly subjective; existentialist art is therefore, by nature, not imitation but expression; it is an expression of a unique subjectivity, an expression of individuality of the protagonist. Existentialist artworks express the protagonist’s individual existentialist attitude towards the world. Therefore, traditional plot structures, like Aristotle’s idea of plot, are not applicable to existentialist art because the logic of the events is not the focus of the play. Sartre (1992:129) argues that existentialist playwrights are not interested in portraying a chain of events which will drive the protagonist to make choice. What really matters for the playwright is whether the action is authentic; this is what gives significance to the drama. In order to express his philosophical views, Sartre created a new dramatic concept called the theatre of situations.

Daigle (2009:36) points out that although it is human choice that brings meaning to the world, the existence of the world itself is not brought into question by the choice. According

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to him, Sartre says that “existence is not necessary; to exist is simply to be there ... no necessary being can explain existence ... everything is gratuitous” (Daigle, 2009:36). The pre-existing world is called facticity (also called situation or being-in-itself) by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre, 1992:461); to choose is to engage one’s consciousness with facticity.

As mentioned above, consciousness is always consciousness of something; it is, therefore, in the relationship between the consciousness and the situation that the meaning of life could be defined. Therefore, the choice is inseparable from the situation and it must reside in the situation. According to Sherman (2012:151), for Sartre, freedom and choice cannot exist in a vacuum; a free man can only create meaning in his life when he confronts the situation. Sherman points out that Sartre says, “there is freedom only in a situation, and there is a situation only through freedom” (Sherman, 2012:151). For Sartre, situation includes not only the material world but also factual attributes which human beings have (Sartre, 1992:540), for instance, the body attributes such as the colour of the skin, the size of the feet; social status such as race, family background, class; mental conditions such as desires or personality. People’s beliefs are also part of this category.

However, for Sartre (1992:619), situation as factual properties cannot determine the meaning of human life. According to Bigsby (1982:168), Sartre does not deny the legitimacy of morality and social order; he argues only that social order and morality are situations which are inadequate to give meaning to human life. This is not because these facts are not real, but because they are inadequate for defining the meaning of life. Morality and social order, for example, character, virtue or law, do represent important aspects of human life, but complying with these standards does not make life significant or meaningful. For instance, the school law can require a student to be in the lecture room on time, but being on time does not mean that this student is excellent. The law can stop people from stealing, but not stealing does not make a person honest.

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In order to give life meaning, the existentialist hero must make authentic choices within the situations in which he finds himself. Søren Kierkegaard (1980:34) says:

I certainly do not deny that I still accept an imperative of knowledge and that through it men may be influenced, but then it must come alive in me, and this is what I now recognize as the most important of all.

For all the reasons explained above, situation normally takes primacy in Sartre's plays.

According to Bigsby (1982:165), the purpose of the theatre of situations is to show a character in the process of creating the meaning of life in the situation. The main task of the theatre of situations is to portray a specific human situation in which human choice is most radically at stake. Bigsby quotes Sartre's words from his essay *For a Theatre of Situations*:

If it's true that man is free in a given situation and that in and through that situation he chooses what he will be, then what we have to show in the theatre are simple and human situations and free individuals in these situations choosing what they will be ... The moving thing the theatre can show is a character creating himself, the moment of choice, of free decision which commits him to a moral code and a whole way of life (Bigsby, 1982:165).

The protagonist's reaction to the situation will create his personality and make him who he is. Each situation presents the set of choices the protagonist will take up through action. As Sartre puts it: "We all know that the world changes man and man changes the world. And if that is not what the basic subject of any play should be, the drama no longer has a subject" (Sartre, 1976:70).

In his own words, Sartre says that "every imaginary presentation of the world is an act of freedom speaking to other freedoms about possible ways of engaging freedom in the world" (Sartre, 1988:32). Art expresses not only the freedom and autonomy of the individual but also aims to get people to wake up and create something in the world or situations around them. Art calls for people to assume their responsibility of freedom. For Sartre (1988:14),

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every existentialist artwork is an appeal; it is to introduce the conception of freedom to the spectators and appeal to people to use it in real situations. About the function of art he says in *What is Literature* that literature is “to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility before the object which has been thus laid bare” (Sartre, 1988:14).

As in Greek tragedy, the protagonist in existentialist drama also suffers. Cole (2001:139) argues that in order to reach authenticity in the drama, the situations portrayed are not those found in everyday life but moments of great crisis and extreme situations. However, Sartre rejects the idea that the catharsis effect originates from the audiences’ empathy towards the protagonist’s suffering. According to Cole, Sartre believes that:

A play should not seem too familiar. Its greatness derives from its social and, in a certain sense, religious functions: it must remain a rite; even as it speaks to the spectators of themselves it must do it in a tone and with a constant reserve of manner which, far from breeding familiarity, will increase the distance between play and audience (Cole, 2001:141).

The situations in such plays are not ordinary situations; they are extreme situations which often lead to death. Such extreme situations can make the protagonist realize the absurdity of the human condition. Lavine (1984:332) points out that Martin Heidegger says that “if I take death into my life, acknowledge it, and face it squarely, I will free myself from the anxiety of death and the pettiness of life – and only then will I be free to become myself” (Lavine, 1984:332). Within these particular situations the individual is confronted with the conflict of being aware of the absurd, and a need for justification which creates a strong dramatic tension.

Orestes in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* refuses his freedom by accepting a pre-ordained moral role. However, Orestes’ matricide in *The Flies* is intended to portray a road becoming free in the situations. Orestes’ situation presented in *The Flies* is a collective human problem: how should humans use the freedom to make their own choice? The stages

this Orestes has experienced reflect the stages a person must face in order to make an authentic choice. Orestes has no predetermined identity to be realised. He is someone who knows that he has to make his own choice, rather than one which has been predetermined by the gods or fate. He does not choose in terms of what religion or morality requires. He stands alone against the society and even god; he makes his choice from his own authenticity. His action is governed by the norm of authenticity, which is the degree to which one is true to oneself despite external pressures. He is responsible for his actions, and he has created his own destiny by killing Clytemnestra.

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## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Orestes' story of matricide has been dramatized by both Aeschylus and Sartre. Although the main narrative outlines of these stories are similar, there are significant variations in the authors' focus.

Classical humanism has an essentialist conception of the human being. There are moral standards that the human being must discover or learn. These unchangeable moral standards guide human beings in making their choices. This philosophical view of human choices is reflected in Greek tragedy. A protagonist is often portrayed as a conveyor of particular social standards which motivate the protagonist to choose certain actions. A protagonist in Greek tragedy has the role of revealing these social standards. Orestes in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* is portrayed as having moral burdens imposed on him. In order to observe/uphold the law of revenge. He commits matricide, a heart-breaking and disgusting act, in order to preserve the law of revenge which was the accepted way to uphold the social justice. But eventually, in the *Eumenides*, his personal suffering brings the message that the old law of revenge is no longer appropriate and that the new order of justice by law is the answer to the problem.

However, for Sartre, human beings exist in the world in a special way in contrast with other beings. The most important thing for human beings is to realize that human nature is free; human beings are free and "fated" to be free; they have the responsibility to create their own values and their own identities. To avoid being free is to flee from his responsibility, and to engage in bad faith or self-deception. The human being ought to create individual meaning shaped by his experiences. As a consequence, the fundamental aim of existentialist art is to deliberately challenge the individual to wake up from self-deception and take the responsibility of freedom, creating meaning in the world and life. *The Flies* is an adaptation of the *Oresteia*. The way of portraying the protagonist in Greek tragedy is not suitable for exploring Sartre's views on radical human freedom and authentic choices. In order to embody his existentialist views in the story, Sartre has to make a careful and deliberate

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change in the way of depicting the protagonist, Orestes. Aeschylus' depiction of Orestes is transformed in Sartre's drama in order to emphasize Sartre's philosophical theme.

The first transformation lies in the goal that Sartre's play intends to reach. The *Oresteia* has moral intentions; the play was not created only for the sake of entertaining the audiences, but also for the sake of educating them. The social problems of the contemporary *polis* were addressed in the *Oresteia*; the possible resolutions are represented in the play as well. In the *Choephoroi*, Orestes faithfully keeps and pursues the rule of revenge. However, in the *Eumenides*, Aeschylus tells the audiences that the old law of revenge must give way and the new social law must be instituted. The establishment of the new social rule appears to be one of Aeschylus' purposes in writing the *Oresteia*.

In contrast, *The Flies* explores Sartre's idea of human freedom. Freedom consists both in "freedom from" and "freedom to". "Freedom from" is to be liberated from restrictions and this is the first step in Sartre's theory of freedom. "Freedom to" is to make use of freedom in order to make creative choices, to create meaning of life by making choices. Authenticity is the principle governing the choices people make. Therefore, the motivation of Orestes' matricide in *The Flies* must not have anything to do with politics and morality. Revenge as the main purpose of Orestes' matricide in the *Choephoroi* must be replaced by the desire of making an authentic choice.

The second transformation revolves around the protagonist's character. In the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides*, Orestes is fully convinced that he should take the responsibility of avenging Agamemnon. He commits matricide because he is a responsible person; his social responsibilities are far more important than his private welfare. The idea of absolute individual freedom is absent in Orestes' world. In order to create an image of the virtuous hero, Aeschylus portrays gods' will, fate, gender identity and other moral pressures as the motivations which drive Orestes to kill his mother. In fulfilling these duties, Orestes is portrayed as a moral hero who is an example to the audiences of how to behave according to their own responsibilities in the *polis*.



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An authentic existentialist character, on the other hand, must be someone who creates his own moral rules, rather than presuming given rules. The protagonist makes his own choices which might be against popular opinion; he must create his own value based on his own freedom. The protagonist's action in Sartre's play is governed by the norm of authenticity, which is the degree to which one is true to himself despite external pressures. Orestes, as Sartre's prototype of the hero, must be portrayed in a different way from Orestes in the *Oresteia*. Orestes in *The Flies* is portrayed as a person who undergoes his journey to freedom. The play represents the different steps by which a man of reflection can become a man of meaningful action and by which his actions are not simply gratuitous. The stages of Orestes' development in the play mirror the necessary stages that one must undergo in making meaningful choices. The first stage is to actualize human freedom. Orestes must break down the burdens of past experience and responsibility. Then he is actually free to make choices for which he can hold himself accountable. The second stage is to make authentic choices. Not everybody can face their responsibility of freedom. Orestes has overcome the anguish and takes his responsibility of freedom; he seeks to establish his own identity through his acts, committing matricide. He is therefore the existentialist hero in Sartre's view.

Therefore, while revenge is one of the main themes in Aeschylus' play, Sartre's Orestes does not kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra for vengeance or because it is his destiny, but in order to exercise human freedom. Orestes in *The Flies* does not decide to avenge his father because of any social rules. His decision is prompted by his search for his own identity. Killing his own mother is not a moral choice for Orestes, but an existentialist choice. The protagonist in Sartre's play does not have a readymade right or wrong answer guiding his choice; he makes his own choices by exercising his free will. Sartre's play emphasizes the fact that Orestes comes to the decision through authenticity. This stands in direct contrast to the Orestes in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides*, who relies on the direction of moral law. Unlike Orestes in the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* who eventually escapes from the judgement of the gods, Orestes in *The Flies* finally escapes from the self-deception. Orestes

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in *The Flies* makes his own choice according to the rule of authenticity; he is his own master and the designer of his own destiny. Unlike Orestes in the *Choephoroi* who is seen as a conveyer of certain moral values, Orestes in *The Flies* is the creator of his own moral rules.

The third transformation that Sartre employs concerns the form of the drama. One of the most important principles of depicting a protagonist in the Greek tragedy is the priority of the plot. The purpose of writing the *Oresteia* is not to demonstrate the character development of Orestes; rather, the focus is on the logic of plot. It is not the intention of Aeschylus to place Orestes' moral qualities at the centre of the play. The role of Orestes is designed to help the audience to understand the meaning of the plot. Since arguments for establishing a new social law is a primary focus in Aeschylus' creation of the *Oresteia*, Orestes' moral qualities are merely used to help the audience understand the importance of the new social order.

As a consequence, the "theatre of plot", as it occurs in Greek tragedy could not serve Sartre's purpose of expressing human subjectivity. Sartre therefore invents a new drama form, the theatre of situations. In order to let the protagonist demonstrate his authenticity in the drama, the situations must not be those found in ordinary life but moments of great crisis and extreme situations. Such situations often potentially lead to death, which creates a strong dramatic tension. The protagonist's reaction to the situation is designed to show his authenticity; his reaction creates his personality and makes him who he is.

In conclusion: for Aeschylus, essence precedes existence; the personality or character of the protagonist determines his actions. For Sartre, however, the process is reversed. The protagonist acts first; his personality or character is created after the action. The protagonist in the theatre of situations is the person who has the responsibility to create meaning in an absurd world and to create his own meaning of life. He could either accept his responsibility and make authentic choices in the extreme situations in which he finds himself, or deny the responsibility and fall into bad faith. His choice is free from moral sanction, but the choice

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must be true to himself. While Aeschylus portrays Orestes as a person who is fated to make certain choices, Orestes in *The Flies* seeks to establish its own identity through his acts. Thus, Sartre rejects the notion of pre-determined moral qualities in people, and claims that people must take responsibility for their actions. For Sartre, there is nothing to dictate humans' choices. Moral quality and personality is not revealed but created in the situations when the protagonist makes an authentic choice.

It is hoped that this thesis has succeeded in demonstrating how the same ancient myth may be used to fulfil completely different purposes. Both Aeschylus and Sartre portray Orestes as committing matricide, yet each author has introduced a new value system into the story, which is presented to the contemporary audiences.

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